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ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING'S

POETICAL WORKS.

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POEMS.

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POEMS.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE.

I.

A KNIGHT of gallant deeds
And a young page at his side,
From the holy war in Palestine
Did slow and thoughtful ride,
As each were a palmer and told for beads
The dews of the eventide.

II.

'O young page,' said the knight,
'A noble page art thou!
Thou fearest not to steep in blood
The curls upon thy brow;
And once in the tent, and twice in the fight,
Didst ward me a mortal blow.'

III.

'O brave knight,' said the page,
'Or ere we hither came,
We talked in tent, we talked in field,
Of the bloody battle-game;
But here, below this greenwood bough,
I cannot speak the same.

IV.

'Our troop is far behind,
The woodland calm is new;
Our steeds, with slow grass-muffled hoofs,
Tread deep the shadows through;
And in my mind, some blessing kind
Is dropping with the dew.

V.

'The woodland calm is pure—
I cannot choose but have
A thought from these, o' the beechen-trees
Which in our England wave,
And of the little finches fine
Which sang there while in Palestine
The warrior-hilt we drave.

VI.

'Methinks, a moment gone,
I heard my mother pray!
I heard, sir knight, the prayer for me

Wherein she passed away;
And I know the Heavens are leaning down
To hear what I shall say.'

VII.

The page spake calm and high,
As of no mean degree;
Perhaps he felt in nature's broad
Full heart, his own was free:
And the knight looked up to his lifted eye,
Then answered smilingly—

VIII.

'Sir page, I pray your grace!
Certes, I meant not so
To cross your pastoral mood, sir page,
With the crook of the battle-bow;
But a knight may speak of a lady's face,
I ween, in any mood or place,
If the grasses die or grow.

IX.

And this I meant to say—
My lady's face shall shine
As ladies' faces use, to greet
My page from Palestine;
Or, speak she fair or prank she gay,
She is no lady of mine.

X.

'And this I meant to fear—
Her bower may suit thee ill;
For, sooth, in that same field and tent,
Thy *talk* was somewhat still:
And fitter thy hand for my knightly spear
Than thy tongue for my lady's will!'

XI.

Slowly and thankfully
The young page bowed his head;
His large eyes seemed to muse a smile,
Until he blushed instead,
And no lady in her bower, pardiè,
Could blush more sudden red:
'Sir Knight,—thy lady's bower to me
Is suited well,' he said.

XII.

Beati, beati, mortui!
From the convent on the sea,
One mile off, or scarce so nigh,
Swells the dirge as clear and high
As if that, over brake and lea,
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of St. Mary,
And the fifty tapers burning o'er it,
And the lady Abbess dead before it,
And the chanting nuns whom yesterweek

Her voice did charge and bless,—
Chanting steady, chanting meek,
Chanting with a solemn breath
Because that they are thinking less
Upon the Dead than upon death.
Beati, beati, mortui!
Now the vision in the sound
Wheeleth on the wind around;
Now it sweepeth back, away—
The uplands will not let it stay
To dark the western sun:
Mortui!—away at last,—
Or ere the page's blush is past!
And the knight heard all, and the page heard none.

XIII.

'A boon, thou noble knight,
If ever I servëd thee!
Though thou art a knight and I am a page,
Now grant a boon to me;
And tell me sooth, if dark or bright,
If little loved or loved aright
Be the face of thy ladye.'

XIV.

Gloomily looked the knight—
'As a son thou hast servëd me,
And would to none I had granted boon
Except to only thee!

For haply then I should love aright,
For then I should know if dark or bright
Were the face of my ladye.

XV.

'Yet it still suits my knightly tongue
To grudge that granted boon,
That heavy price from heart and life
I paid in silence down;
The hand that claimed it, cleared in fine
My father's fame: I swear by mine,
That price was nobly won!

XVI.

'Earl Walter was a brave old earl,
He was my father's friend;
And while I rode the lists at court
And little guessed the end,
My noble father in his shroud
Against a slanderer lying loud
He rose up to defend.

XVII.

'Oh, calm below the marble grey
My father's dust was strown!
Oh, meek above the marble grey
His image prayed alone!

The slanderer lied: the wretch was brave—
For, looking up the minster-nave,
He saw my father's knightly glaive
Was changed from steel to stone.

XVIII.

'Earl Walter's glaive was steel,
With a brave old hand to wear it,
And dashed the lie back in the mouth
Which lied against the godly truth
And against the knightly merit:
The slanderer, 'neath the avenger's heel,
Struck up the dagger in appeal
From stealthy lie to brutal force—
And out upon the traitor's corse
Was yielded the true spirit.

XIX.

'I would mine hand had fought that fight
And justified my father!
I would mine heart had caught that wound
And slept beside him rather!
I think it were a better thing
Than murdered friend and marriage-ring
Forced on my life together

XX.

'Wail shook Earl Walter's house;
His true wife shed no tear;

She lay upon her bed as mute
As the earl did on his bier:
Till—'Ride, ride fast,' she said at last,
'And bring the avengëd's son anear!
Ride fast, ride free, as a dart can flee,
For white of blee with waiting for me
Is the corse in the next chambère.'

XXI.

'I came, I knelt beside her bed;
Her calm was worse than strife:
'My husband, for thy father dear,
Gave freely when thou wast not here
His own and eke my life.
A boon! Of that sweet child we make
An orphan for thy father's sake,
Make thou, for ours, a wife.'

XXII.

'I said, 'My steed neighs in the court,
My bark rocks on the brine,
And the warrior's vow I am under now
To free the pilgrim's shrine;
But fetch the ring and fetch the priest
And call that daughter of thine,
And rule she wide from my castle on Nyde
While I am in Palestine.'

XXIII.

'In the dark chambère, if the bride was fair,
Ye wis, I could not see,
But the steed thrice neighed, and the priest fast prayed,
And wedded fast were we. . .
Her mother smiled upon her bed
As at its side we knelt to wed,
And the bride rose from her knee
And kissed the smile of her mother dead,
Or ever she kissed me.

XXIV.

'My page, my page, what grieves thee so,
That the tears run down thy face?'—
'Alas, alas! mine own sistèr
Was in thy lady's case:
But *she* laid down the silks she wore
And followed him she wed before,
Disguised as his true servitor,
To the very battle-place.'

XXV.

And wept the page, but laughed the knight,
A careless laugh laughed he:
'Well done it were for thy sistèr,
But not for my ladye!
My love, so please you, shall requite
No woman, whether dark or bright,
Unwomaned if she be.'

XXVI.

The page stopped weeping and smiled cold—
'Your wisdom may declare
That womanhood is proved the best
By golden brooch and glossy vest
The mincing ladies wear;
Yet is it proved, and was of old,
Anear as well, I dare to hold,
By truth, or by despair.'

XXVII.

He smiled no more, he wept no more,
But passionate he spake—
'Oh, womanly she prayed in tent,
When none beside did wake!
Oh, womanly she paled in fight,
For one belovëd's sake!—
And her little hand, defiled with blood,
Her tender tears of womanhood
Most woman-pure did make!'

XXVIII.

—'Well done it were for thy sister,
Thou tellest well her tale!
But for my lady, she shall pray
I' the kirk of Nydesdale.
Not dread for me but love for me
Shall make my lady pale;

No casque shall hide her woman's tear—
It shall have room to trickle clear
Behind her woman's veil.'

XXIX.

—'But what if she mistook thy mind
And followed thee to strife,
Then kneeling did entreat thy love
As Paynims ask for life?'
—'I would forgive, and evermore
Would love her as my servitor,
But little as my wife.

XXX.

'Look up—there is a small bright cloud
Alone amid the skies!
So high, so pure, and so apart,
A woman's honour lies.'
The page looked up—the cloud was sheen—
A sadder cloud did rush, I ween,
Betwixt it and his eyes.

XXXI.

Then dimly dropped his eyes away
From welkin unto hill—
Ha! who rides there?—the page is 'ware,
Though the cry at his heart is still:

And the page seeth all and the knight seeth none,
Though banner and spear do fleck the sun,
And the Saracens ride at will.

XXXII.

He speaketh calm, he speaketh low,—
'Ride fast, my master, ride,
Or ere within the broadening dark
The narrow shadows hide.'
'Yea, fast, my page, I will do so,
And keep thou at my side.'

XXXIII.

'Now nay, now nay, ride on thy way,
Thy faithful page precede.
For I must loose on saddle-bow
My battle-casque that galls, I trow,
The shoulder of my steed;
And I must pray, as I did vow,
For one in bitter need.

XXXIV.

'Ere night I shall be near to thee,—
Now ride, my master, ride!
Ere night, as parted spirits cleave
To mortals too beloved to leave,
I shall be at thy side.'
The knight smiled free at the fantasy,
And adown the dell did ride.

XXXV.

Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
No smile the word had won;
Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
I ween he had never gone:
Had the knight looked back to the page's geste,
I ween he had turned anon,
For dread was the woe in the face so young,
And wild was the silent geste that flung
Casque, sword to earth, as the boy down-sprung
And stood—alone, alone.

XXXVI.

He clenched his hands as if to hold
His soul's great agony—
'Have I renounced my womanhood,
For wifehood unto *thee*,
And is this the last, last look of thine
That ever I shall see?

XXXVII.

'Yet God thee save, and may'st thou have
A lady to thy mind,
More woman-proud and half as true
As one thou leav'st behind!
And God me take with HIM to dwell—
For HIM I cannot love too well,
As I have loved my kind.'

XXXVIII.

SHE looketh up, in earth's despair,
The hopeful heavens to seek;
That little cloud still floateth there,
Whereof her loved did speak:
How bright the little cloud appears!
Her eyelids fall upon the tears,
And the tears down either cheek.

XXXIX.

The tramp of hoof, the flash of steel—
The Paynims round her coming!
The sound and sight have made her calm,—
False page, but truthful woman;
She stands amid them all unmoved:
A heart once broken by the loved
Is strong to meet the foeman.

XL.

'Ho, Christian page! art keeping sheep,
From pouring wine-cups resting?'—
'I keep my master's noble name,
For warring, not for feasting;
And if that here Sir Hubert were,
My master brave, my master dear,
Ye would not stay the questing.'

XLI.

'Where is thy master, scornful page,
That we may slay or bind him?'—
'Now search the lea and search the wood,
And see if ye can find him!
Nathless, as hath been often tried,
Your Paynim heroes faster ride
Before him than behind him.'

XLII.

'Give smoother answers, lying page,
Or perish in the lying!'—
'I trow that if the warrior brand
Beside my foot, were in my hand,
'Twere better at replying!'
They cursed her deep, they smote her low,
They cleft her golden ringlets through;
The Loving is the Dying.

XLIII.

She felt the scimitar gleam down,
And met it from beneath
With smile more bright in victory
Than any sword from sheath,—
Which flashed across her lip serene,
Most like the spirit-light between
The darks of life and death.

XLIV.

Ingemisco, ingemisco!
From the convent on the sea,
Now it sweepeth solemnly,
As over wood and over lea
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of St. Mary,
And the fifty tapers paling o'er it,
And the Lady Abbess stark before it,
And the weary nuns with hearts that faintly
Beat along their voices saintly—
Ingemisco, ingemisco!
Dirge for abbess laid in shroud
Sweepeth o'er the shroudless Dead,
Page or lady, as we said,
With the dews upon her head,
All as sad if not as loud.
Ingemisco, ingemisco!
Is ever a lament begun
By any mourner under sun,
Which, ere it endeth, suits but *one?*

THE LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY.

—♦—

FIRST PART.

'Onora, Onora,'—her mother is calling,
She sits at the lattice and hears the dew falling
Drop after drop from the sycamores laden
With dew as with blossom, and calls home the maiden,
'Night cometh, Onora.'

She looks down the garden-walk caverned with trees,
To the limes at the end where the green arbour is—
'Some sweet thought or other may keep where it found her,
While, forgot or unseen in the dreamlight around her,
Night cometh—Onora!'

She looks up the forest whose alleys shoot on
Like the mute minster-aisles when the anthem is done
And the choristers sitting with faces aslant
Feel the silence to consecrate more than the chant—
'Onora, Onora!'

And forward she looketh across the brown heath—
'Onora, art coming?'—what is it she seeth?
Nought, nought but the grey border-stone that is wist
To dilate and assume a wild shape in the mist—
'My daughter!' Then over

The casement she leaneth, and as she doth so
She is 'ware of her little son playing below:
'Now where is Onora?' He hung down his head
And spake not, then answering blushed scarlet-red,—
'At the tryst with her lover.'

But his mother was wroth: in a sternness quoth she,
'As thou play'st at the ball art thou playing with me?
When we know that her lover to battle is gone,
And the saints know above that she loveth but one
And will ne'er wed another?'

Then the boy wept aloud; 'twas a fair sight yet sad
To see the tears run down the sweet blooms he had:
He stamped with his foot, said—'The saints know I lied
Because truth that is wicked is fittest to hide!
Must I utter it, mother?'

In his vehement childhood he hurried within
And knelt at her feet as in prayer against sin,
But a child at a prayer never sobbeth as he—
Oh! she sits with the nun of the brown rosary,
At nights in the ruin—

'The old convent ruin the ivy rots off,
Where the owl hoots by day and the toad is sun-proof,
Where no singing-birds build and the trees gaunt and grey
As in stormy sea-coasts appear blasted one way—
But is *this* the wind's doing?

'A nun in the east wall was buried alive
Who mocked at the priest when he called her to shrive,
And shrieked such a curse, as the stone took her breath,
The old abbess fell backwards and swooned unto death
With an Ave half-spoken.

'I tried once to pass it, myself and my hound,
Till, as fearing the lash, down he shivered to ground—
A brave hound, my mother! a brave hound, ye wot!
And the wolf thought the same with his fangs at her throat
In the pass of the Brocken.

'At dawn and at eve, mother, who sitteth there
With the brown rosary never used for a prayer?
Stoop low, mother, low! If we went there to see,
What an ugly great hole in that east wall must be
At dawn and at even!

'Who meet there, my mother, at dawn and at even?
Who meet by that wall, never looking to heaven?
O sweetest my sister, what doeth with *thee*
The ghost of a nun with a brown rosary
And a face turned from heaven?

'St. Agnes o'erwatcheth my dreams and erewhile
I have felt through mine eyelids the warmth of her smile;
But last night, as a sadness like pity came o'er her,
She whispered—'Say *two* prayers at dawn for Onora:
The Tempted is sinning.''

'Onora, Onora!' they heard her not coming,
Not a step on the grass, not a voice through the gloaming;
But her mother looked up, and she stood on the floor
Fair and still as the moonlight that came there before;
And a smile just beginning:

It touches her lips but it dares not arise
To the height of the mystical sphere of her eyes,
And the large musing eyes, neither joyous nor sorry,
Sing on like the angels in separate glory
Between clouds of amber;

For the hair droops in clouds amber-coloured till stirred
Into gold by the gesture that comes with a word;
While—O soft!—her speaking is so interwound
Of the dim and the sweet, 'tis a twilight of sound
And floats through the chamber.

'Since thou shrivest my brother, fair mother,' said she,
'I count on thy priesthood for marrying of me;
And I know by the hills that the battle is done,
That my lover rides on, will be here with the sun,
'Neath the eyes that behold thee.'

Her mother sate silent—too tender, I wis,
Of the smile her dead father smiled dying to kiss:
But the boy started up pale with tears, passion-wrought—
'O wicked fair sister, the hills utter nought!
If he cometh, who told thee?'

'I know by the hills,' she resumed calm and clear,
'By the beauty upon them, that HE is anear:
Did they ever look *so* since he bade me adieu?
Oh, love in the waking, sweet brother, is true
As St. Agnes in sleeping!'

Half-ashamed and half-softened the boy did not speak,
And the blush met the lashes which fell on his cheek:
She bowed down to kiss him: dear saints, did he see
Or feel on her bosom the BROWN ROSARY,
That he shrank away weeping?

SECOND PART.

A bed. ONORA *sleeping.* Angels, *but not near.*

First Angel.

Must we stand so far, and she
So very fair?

Second Angel.

As bodies be.

First Angel.

And she so mild?

Second Angel.

As spirits when
They meeken, not to God, but men.

First Angel.

And she so young, that I who bring
Good dreams for saintly children, might
Mistake that small soft face to-night,
And fetch her such a blessèd thing
That at her waking she would weep
For childhood lost anew in sleep.
How hath she sinned?

Second Angel.

In bartering love;
God's love for man's.

First Angel.

We may reprove
The world for this, not only her:
Let me approach to breathe away
This dust o' the heart with holy air.

Second Angel.

Stand off! She sleeps, and did not pray.

First Angel.

Did none pray for her?

Second Angel.

Ay, a child,—
Who never, praying, wept before:
While, in a mother undefiled,

Prayer goeth on in sleep, as true
And pauseless as the pulses do.

First Angel.

Then I approach.

Second Angel.

It is not WILLED.

First Angel.

One word: is she redeemed?

Second Angel.

No more!
The place is filled. [Angels *vanish.*

Evil Spirit in a Nun's garb by the bed.

Forbear that dream—forbear that dream! too near to heaven it leaned.

Onora in sleep.

Nay, leave me this—but only this! 'tis but a dream, sweet fiend!

Evil Spirit.

It is a *thought.*

Onora in sleep.

A sleeping thought—most innocent of good:
It doth the Devil no harm, sweet fiend! it cannot, if it would.
I say in it no holy hymn, I do no holy work,
I scarcely hear the sabbath-bell that chimeth from the kirk.

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream—forbear that dream!

Onora in sleep. Nay, let me dream at least.

That far-off bell, it may be took for viol at a feast:
I only walk among the fields, beneath the autumn-sun,
With my dead father, hand in hand, as I have often done.

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream—forbear that dream!

Onora in sleep.

Nay, sweet fiend, let me go:
I never more can walk with *him*, oh, never more but so!
For they have tied my father's feet beneath the kirk-yard stone,
Oh, deep and straight, oh, very straight! they move at nights alone:
And then he calleth through my dreams, he calleth tenderly,
'Come forth my daughter, my beloved, and walk the fields with me!'

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream, or else disprove its pureness by a sign.

Onora in sleep.

Speak on, thou shalt be satisfied, my word shall answer thine.
I heard a bird which used to sing when I a child was praying,
I see the poppies in the corn I used to sport away in:
What shall I do—tread down the dew and pull the blossoms blowing?
Or clap my wicked hands to fright the finches from the rowen?

Evil Spirit.

Thou shalt do something harder still. Stand up where thou dost stand
Among the fields of Dreamland with thy father hand in hand,
And clear and slow repeat the vow, declare its cause and kind,
Which not to break, in sleep or wake thou bearest on thy mind.

Onora in sleep.

I bear a vow of sinful kind, a vow for mournful cause;
I vowed it deep, I vowed it strong, the spirits laughed applause:
The spirits trailed along the pines low laughter like a breeze,
While, high atween their swinging tops, the stars appeared to freeze.

Evil Spirit.

More calm and free, speak out to me why such a vow was made.

Onora in sleep.

Because that God decreed my death and I shrank back afraid.
Have patience, O dead father mine! I did not fear to die—
I wish I were a young dead child and had thy company!
I wish I lay beside thy feet, a buried three-year child,
And wearing only a kiss of thine upon my lips that smiled!

The linden-tree that covers thee might so have shadowed twain,
For death itself I did not fear—'tis love that makes the pain:
Love feareth death. I was no child, I was betrothed that day;
I wore a troth-kiss on my lips I could not give away.
How could I bear to lie content and still beneath a stone,
And feel mine own betrothed go by—alas! no more mine own—
Go leading by in wedding pomp some lovely lady brave,
With cheeks that blushed as red as rose, while mine were white in grave?
How could I bear to sit in heaven, on e'er so high a throne.
And hear him say to her—to *her!* that else he loveth none?
Though e'er so high I sate above, though e'er so low he spake,
As clear as thunder I should hear the new oath he might take,
That hers, forsooth, were heavenly eyes—ah me, while very dim
Some heavenly eyes (indeed of heaven!) would darken down to *him!*

Evil Spirit.

Who told thee thou wast called to death?

Onora in sleep.

I sate all night beside thee:

The grey owl on the ruined wall shut both his eyes to hide thee,
And ever he flapped his heavy wing all brokenly and weak,
And the long grass waved against the sky, around his gasping beak:
I sate beside thee all the night, while the moonlight lay forlorn
Strewn round us like a dead world's shroud in ghastly fragments torn:
And through the night, and through the hush, and over the flapping wing,
We heard beside the Heavenly Gate the angels murmuring:
We heard them say, 'Put day to day, and count the days to seven,
'And God will draw Onora up the golden stairs of heaven;
'And yet the Evil ones have leave that purpose to defer,
'For if she has no need of HIM, He has no need of her.'

Evil Spirit.

Speak out to me, speak bold and free.

Onora in sleep.

And then I heard thee say—
'I count upon my rosary brown the hours thou hast to stay;
'Yet God permits us Evil ones to put by that decree,
'Since if thou hast no need of HIM, He has no need of thee:

'And if thou wilt forgo the sight of angels, verily
'Thy true love gazing on thy face shall guess what angels be;
'Nor bride shall pass, save thee' . . . Alas!—my father's hand's à-cold,
The meadows seem . . .

Evil Spirit.

Forbear the dream, or let the vow be told.

Onora in sleep.

I vowed upon thy rosary brown, this string of antique beads,
By charnel lichens overgrown, and dank among the weeds,
This rosary brown which is thine own,—lost soul of buried nun!
Who, lost by vow, wouldst render now all souls alike undone,—
I vowed upon thy rosary brown,—and, till such vow should break,
A pledge always of living days 'twas hung around my neck—
I vowed to thee on rosary, (dead father, look not so!),
I would not thank God in my weal, nor seek God in my woe.

Evil Spirit.

And canst thou prove . . .

Onora in sleep.

O love, my love! I felt him near again!
I saw his steed on mountain-head, I heard it on the plain!

Was this no weal for me to feel? Is greater weal than this?
Yet when he came, I wept his name—and the angels heard but *his*.

Evil Spirit.

Well done, well done!

Onora in sleep.

Ah me, the sun! the dreamlight 'gins to pine,—
Ah me, how dread can look the Dead! Aroint thee, father mine!

She starteth from slumber, she sitteth upright,
And her breath comes in sobs while she stares through the night;
There is nought; the great willow, her lattice before,
Large-drawn in the moon, lieth calm on the floor:
But her hands tremble fast as their pulses and, free
From the death-clasp, close over—the BROWN ROSARY.

THIRD PART.

'Tis a morn for a bridal; the merry bride-bell
Rings clear through the green-wood that skirts the chapelle,
And the priest at the altar awaiteth the bride,
And the sacristans slyly are jesting aside
At the work shall be doing;

While down through the wood rides that fair company,
The youths with the courtship, the maids with the glee,
Till the chapel-cross opens to sight, and at once
All the maids sigh demurely and think for the nonce,
'And so endeth a wooing!'

And the bride and the bridegroom are leading the way,
With his hand on her rein, and a word yet to say:
Her dropt eyelids suggest the soft answers beneath,
And the little quick smiles come and go with her breath
When she sigheth or speaketh.

And the tender bride-mother breaks off unaware
From an Ave, to think that her daughter is fair,
Till in nearing the chapel and glancing before,
She seeth her little son stand at the door:
Is it play that he seeketh?

Is it play, when his eyes wander innocent-wild
And sublimed with a sadness unfitting a child?
He trembles not, weeps not; the passion is done,
And calmly he kneels in their midst, with the sun
On his head like a glory.

'O fair-featured maids, ye are many!' he cried,
'But in fairness and vileness who matcheth the bride?
O brave-hearted youths, ye are many! but whom
For the courage and woe can ye match with the groom
As ye see them before ye?'

Out spake the bride's mother, 'The vileness is thine
If thou shame thine own sister, a bride at the shrine!'
Out spake the bride's lover, 'The vileness be mine
If he shame mine own wife at the hearth or the shrine
And the charge be unprovëd.

'Bring the charge, prove the charge, brother! speak it aloud:
Let thy father and hers hear it deep in his shroud!'
—'O father, thou seest, for dead eyes can see,
How she wears on her bosom *a brown rosary*,
O my father belovëd!'

Then outlaughed the bridegroom, and outlaughed withal
Both maidens and youths by the old chapel-wall:
'So she weareth no love-gift, kind brother,' quoth he,
'She may wear an she listeth a brown rosary,
Like a pure-hearted lady.'

Then swept through the chapel the long bridal train;
Though he spake to the bride she replied not again:
On, as one in a dream, pale and stately she went
Where the altar-lights burn o'er the great sacrament,
Faint with daylight, but steady.

But her brother had passed in between them and her,
And calmly knelt down on the high altar-stair—
Of an infantine aspect so stern to the view
That the priest could not smile on the child's eyes of blue
As he would for another.

He knelt like a child marble-sculptured and white
That seems kneeling to pray on the tomb of a knight,
With a look taken up to each iris of stone
From the greatness and death where he kneeleth, but none
From the face of a mother.

'In your chapel, O priest, ye have wedded and shriven
Fair wives for the hearth, and fair sinners for heaven;
But this fairest my sister, ye think now to wed,
Bid her kneel where she standeth, and shrive her instead:
O shrive her and wed not!'

In tears, the bride's mother,—'Sir priest, unto thee
Would he lie, as he lied to this fair company.'
In wrath, the bride's lover,—'The lie shall be clear!
Speak it out, boy! the saints in their niches shall hear:
Be the charge proved or said not!'

Then serene in his childhood he lifted his face,
And his voice sounded holy and fit for the place,—
'Look down from your niches, ye still saints, and see
How she wears on her bosom *a brown rosary!*
Is it used for the praying?'

The youths looked aside—to laugh there were a sin—
And the maidens' lips trembled from smiles shut within:
Quoth the priest, 'Thou art wild, pretty boy! Blessed she
Who prefers at her bridal a brown rosary
To a worldly arraying.'

The bridegroom spake low and led onward the bride
And before the high altar they stood side by side:
The rite-book is opened, the rite is begun,
They have knelt down together to rise up as one.
Who laughed by the altar?

The maidens looked forward, the youths looked around,
The bridegroom's eye flashed from his prayer at the sound;
And each saw the bride, as if no bride she were,
Gazing cold at the priest without gesture of prayer,
As he read from the psalter.

The priest never knew that she did so, but still
He felt a power on him too strong for his will,
And whenever the Great Name was there to be read,
His voice sank to silence—THAT could not be said,
Or the air could not hold it.

'I have sinnëd,' quoth he, 'I have sinnëd, I wot'—
And the tears ran adown his old cheeks at the thought:
They dropped fast on the book, but he read on the same,
And aye was the silence where should be the NAME,—
As the choristers told it.

The rite-book is closed, and the rite being done
They who knelt down together, arise up as one:
Fair riseth the bride—Oh, a fair bride is she,
But, for all (think the maidens) that brown rosary,
No saint at her praying!

What aileth the bridegroom? He glares blank and
wide;
Then suddenly turning he kisseth the bride;
His lip stung her with cold; she glanced upwardly mute:
'Mine own wife,' he said, and fell stark at her foot
In the word he was saying.

They have lifted him up, but his head sinks away,
And his face showeth bleak in the sunshine and grey.
Leave him now where he lieth—for oh, never more
Will he kneel at an altar or stand on a floor!
Let his bride gaze upon him.

Long and still was her gaze while they chafed him there
And breathed in the mouth whose last life had kissed her,
But when they stood up—only *they!* with a start
The shriek from her soul struck her pale lips apart:
She has lived, and forgone him!

And low on his body she droppeth adown—
'Didst call me thine own wife, belovëd—thine own?
Then take thine own with thee! thy coldness is warm
To the world's cold without thee! Come, keep me from
harm
In a calm of thy teaching.'

She looked in his face earnest-long, as in sooth
There were hope of an answer, and then kissed his
mouth

And with head on his bosom, wept, wept bitterly,—
'Now, O God, take pity—take pity on me!
God, hear my beseeching!'

She was 'ware of a shadow that crossed where she lay,
She was 'ware of a presence that withered the day:
Wild she sprang to her feet,—'I surrender to *thee*
The broken vow's pledge, the accursed rosary,—
I am ready for dying!'

She dashed it in scorn to the marble-paved ground
Where it fell mute as snow, and a weird music-sound
Crept up, like a chill, up the aisles long and dim,—
As the fiends tried to mock at the choristers' hymn
And moaned in the trying.

FOURTH PART.

Onora looketh listlessly adown the garden walk:
'I am weary, O my mother, of thy tender talk.
I am weary of the trees a-waving to and fro,
Of the steadfast skies above, the running brooks below.
All things are the same but I,—only I am dreary,
And, mother, of my dreariness behold me very weary.

'Mother, brother, pull the flowers I planted in the spring
And smiled to think I should smile more upon their gathering:

The bees will find out other flowers—oh, pull them,
dearest mine,
And carry them and carry me before St. Agnes' shrine.'
—Whereat they pulled the summer flowers she planted
in the spring,
And her and them all mournfully to Agnes' shrine did
bring.

She looked up to the pictured saint and gently shook
her head—
'The picture is too calm for *me*—too calm for *me*,' she
said:
'The little flowers we brought with us, before it we may
lay,
For those are used to look at heaven,—but *I* must turn
away,
Because no sinner under sun can dare or bear to gaze
On God's or angel's holiness, except in Jesu's face.'

She spoke with passion after pause—'And were it
wisely done
If we who cannot gaze above, should walk the earth
alone?
If we whose virtue is so weak should have a will so
strong,
And stand blind on the rocks to choose the right path
from the wrong?

To choose perhaps a love-lit hearth, instead of love and heaven,—
A single rose, for a rose-tree which beareth seven times seven?
A rose that droppeth from the hand, that fadeth in the breast,—
Until, in grieving for the worst, we learn what is the best!'
Then breaking into tears,—'Dear God,' she cried, 'and must we see
All blissful things depart from us or ere we go to THEE?
We cannot guess thee in the wood or hear thee in the wind?
Our cedars must fall round us ere we see the light behind?
Ay sooth, we feel too strong, in weal, to need thee on that road,
But woe being come, the soul is dumb that crieth not on 'God.''

Her mother could not speak for tears; she ever musëd thus,
'*The bees will find out other flowers*,—but what is left for *us*?'
But her young brother stayed his sobs and knelt beside her knee,
—'Thou sweetest sister in the world, hast never a word for me?'

She passed her hand across his face, she pressed it on
his cheek,
So tenderly, so tenderly—she needed not to speak.

The wreath which lay on shrine that day, at vespers
bloomed no more.
The woman fair who placed it there, had died an hour
before.
Both perished mute for lack of root, earth's nourish-
ment to reach.
O reader, breathe (the ballad saith) some sweetness
out of each!

A ROMANCE OF THE GANGES.

I.

SEVEN maidens 'neath the midnight
Stand near the river-sea
Whose water sweepeth white around
The shadow of the tree;
The moon and earth are face to face,
And earth is slumbering deep;
The wave-voice seems the voice of dreams
That wander through her sleep:
The river floweth on.

II.

What bring they 'neath the midnight,
Beside the river-sea?
They bring the human heart wherein
No nightly calm can be,—
That droppeth never with the wind,
Nor drieth with the dew:
Oh, calm it God! thy calm is broad
To cover spirits too.
The river floweth on.

III.

The maidens lean them over
The waters, side by side,
And shun each other's deepening eyes,
And gaze adown the tide;
For each within a little boat
A little lamp hath put,
And heaped for freight some lily's weight
Or scarlet rose half shut
The river floweth on.

IV.

Of shell of cocoa carven
Each little boat is made;
Each carries a lamp, and carries a flower,
And carries a hope unsaid;
And when the boat hath carried the lamp
Unquenched till out of sight,
The maiden is sure that love will endure;
But love will fail with light.
The river floweth on.

V.

Why, all the stars are ready
To symbolize the soul,
The stars untroubled by the wind,
Unwearied as they roll;
And yet the soul by instinct sad

Reverts to symbols low—
To that small flame, whose very name
Breathed o'er it, shakes it so!
The river floweth on.

VI.

Six boats are on the river,
Seven maidens on the shore,
While still above them steadfastly
The stars shine evermore.
Go, little boats, go soft and safe,
And guard the symbol spark!
The boats aright go safe and bright
Across the waters dark.
The river floweth on.

VII.

The maiden Luti watcheth
Where onwardly they float;
That look in her dilating eyes
Might seem to drive her boat:
Her eyes still mark the constant fire,
And kindling unawares
That hopeful while, she lets a smile
Crêep silent through her prayers.
The river floweth on.

VIII.

The smile—where hath it wandered?
She riseth from her knee,

She holds her dark, wet locks away—
There is no light to see!
She cries a quick and bitter cry—
'Nuleeni, launch me thine!
We must have light abroad to-night,
For all the wreck of mine.'
The river floweth on.

IX.

'I do remember watching
Beside this river-bed
When on my childish knee was leaned
My dying father's head;
I turned mine own to keep the tears
From falling on his face:
What doth it prove when Death and Love
Choose out the self-same place?'
The river floweth on.

X.

'They say the dead are joyful
The death-change here receiving:
Who say—ah, me! who dare to say
Where joy comes to the living?
Thy boat, Nuleeni! look not sad—
Light up the waters rather!
I weep no faithless lover where
I wept a loving father.'
The river floweth on.

XI.

'My heart foretold his falsehood
Ere my little boat grew dim;
And though I closed mine eyes to dream
That one last dream of *him*,
They shall not now be wet to see
The shining vision go:
From earth's cold love I look above
To the holy house of snow.'*
The river floweth on.

XII.

'Come thou—thou never knewest
A grief, that thou shouldst fear one!
Thou wearest still the happy look
That shines beneath a dear one:
Thy humming-bird is in the sun,†
Thy cuckoo in the grove,
And all the three broad worlds, for thee
Are full of wandering love.'
The river floweth on.

XIII.

'Why, maiden, dost thou loiter?
What secret wouldst thou cover?

* The Hindoo heaven is localized on the summit of Mount Meru —one of the mountains of Himalaya or Himmaleh, which signifies, I believe, in Sanscrit, the abode of snow, winter, or coldness.

† Himadeva, the Indian god of love, is imagined to wander through the three worlds, accompanied by the humming-bird, cuckoo, and gentle breezes.

That peepul cannot hide thy boat,
And I can guess thy lover;
I heard thee sob his name in sleep,
It was a name I knew:
Come, little maid, be not afraid,
But let us prove him true!'
The river floweth on.

XIV.

The little maiden cometh,
She cometh shy and slow;
I ween she seeth through her lids
They drop adown so low:
Her tresses meet her small bare feet,
She stands and speaketh nought,
Yet blusheth red as if she said
The name she only thought.
The river floweth on.

XV.

She knelt beside the water,
She lighted up the flame,
And o'er her youthful forehead's calm
The fitful radiance came:—
'Go, little boat, go soft and safe,
And guard the symbol spark!'
Soft, safe doth float the little boat
Across the waters dark.
The river floweth on.

XVI.

Glad tears her eyes have blinded,
The light they cannot reach;
She turneth with that sudden smile
She learnt before her speech—
'I do not hear his voice, the tears
Have dimmed my light away,
But the symbol light will last to-night,
The love will last for aye!'
The river floweth on.

XVII.

Then Luti spake behind her,
Out-spake she bitterly—
'By the symbol light that lasts to-night,
Wilt vow a vow to me?'
Nuleeni gazeth up her face,
Soft answer maketh she—
'By loves that last when lights are past,
I vow that vow to thee!'
The river floweth on.

XVIII.

An earthly look had Luti
Though her voice was deep as prayer—
'The rice is gathered from the plains
To cast upon thine hair:*

* The casting of rice upon the head, and the fixing of the band or tali about the neck, are parts of the Hindoo marriage ceremonial.

But when *he* comes his marriage-band
Around thy neck to throw,
Thy bride-smile raise to meet his gaze,
And whisper,—*There is one betrays,*
While Luti suffers woe.'
The river floweth on.

XIX.

'And when in seasons after,
Thy little bright-faced son
Shall lean against thy knee and ask
What deeds his sire hath done,—
Press deeper down thy mother-smile
His glossy curls among,
View deep his pretty childish eyes,
And whisper,—*There is none denies,*
While Luti speaks of wrong.'
The river floweth on

XX.

Nuleeni looked in wonder,
Yet softly answered she—
'By loves that last when lights are past,
I vowed that vow to thee:
But why glads it thee that a bride-day be
By a word of *woe* defiled?
That a word of *wrong* take the cradle-song
From the ear of a sinless child?'
'Why?' Luti said, and her laugh was dread,

And her eyes dilated wild—
'That the fair new love may her bridegroom prove
And the father shame the child!'
The river floweth on.

XXI.

'Thou flowest still, O river,
Thou flowest 'neath the moon;
Thy lily hath not changed a leaf,*
Thy charmëd lute a tune:
He mixed his voice with thine and *his*
Was all I heard around;
But now, beside his chosen bride,
I hear the river's sound.'
The river floweth on.

XXII.

'I gaze upon her beauty
Through the tresses that enwreathe it;
The light above thy wave, is hers—
My rest, alone beneath it:
Oh, give me back the dying look
My father gave thy water!
Give back—and let a little love
O'erwatch his weary daughter!'
The river floweth on.

* The Ganges is represented as a white woman, with a water-lily in her right hand, and in her left a lute.

XXIII.

'Give back!' she hath departed—
The word is wandering with her;
And the stricken maidens hear afar
The step and cry together.
Frail symbols? None are frail enow
For mortal joys to borrow!—
While bright doth float Nuleeni's boa
She weepeth dark with sorrow.
The river floweth on.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY.

I.

To the belfry, one by one, went the ringers from the sun,
Toll slowly.
And the oldest ringer said, 'Ours is music for the Dead
When the rebecks are all done.'

II.

Six abeles i' the churchyard grow on the northside in a row,
Toll slowly.
And the shadows of their tops rock across the little slopes
Of the grassy graves below.

III.

On the south side and the west a small river runs in haste,
Toll slowly.

And, between the river flowing and the fair green trees
a-growing,
Do the dead lie at their rest.

IV.

On the east I sate that day, up against a willow
grey:
Toll slowly.
Through the rain of willow-branches I could see the
low hill-ranges
And the river on its way.

V.

There I sate beneath the tree, and the bell tolled
solemnly,
Toll slowly.
While the trees' and river's voices flowed between the
solemn noises,—
Yet death seemed more loud to me.

VI.

There I read this ancient rhyme while the bell did all
the time
Toll slowly.
And the solemn knell fell in with the tale of life
and sin,
Like a rhythmic fate sublime.

THE RHYME.

I.

Broad the forests stood (I read) on the hills of Linteged,
Toll slowly.
And three hundred years had stood mute adown each hoary wood,
Like a full heart having prayed.

II.

And the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,
Toll slowly.
And but little thought was theirs of the silent antique years,
In the building of their nest.

III.

Down the sun dropt large and red on the towers of Linteged,—
Toll slowly.
Lance and spear upon the height, bristling strange in fiery light,
While the castle stood in shade.

IV.

There the castle stood up black with the red sun at its back,
Toll slowly.

Like a sullen smouldering pyre with a top that flickers fire
When the wind is on its track.

V.

And five hundred archers tall did besiege the castle wall,
Toll slowly.
And the castle, seethed in blood, fourteen days and nights had stood
And to-night was near its fall,

VI.

Yet thereunto, blind to doom, three months since, a bride did come.
Toll slowly.
One who proudly trod the floors and softly whispered in the doors,
'May good angels bless our home.'

VII.

Oh, a bride of queenly eyes, with a front of constancies,
Toll slowly.
Oh, a bride of cordial mouth where the untired smile of youth
Did light outward its own sighs!

VIII.

'Twas a Duke's fair orphan-girl, and her uncle's ward—
the Earl,
Toll slowly.
Who betrothed her twelve years old, for the sake of
dowry gold,
To his son Lord Leigh the churl.

IX.

But what time she had made good all her years of
womanhood,
Toll slowly.
Unto both these Lords of Leigh spake she out right
sovranly,
'My will runneth as my blood.

X.

'And while this same blood makes red this same right
hand's veins,' she said,
Toll slowly.
''Tis my will as lady free, not to wed a lord of Leigh,
But Sir Guy of Linteged.'

XI.

The old Earl he smilëd smooth, then he sighed for
wilful youth,—
Toll slowly.
'Good my niece, that hand withal looketh somewhat
soft and small
For so large a will, in sooth.'

XII.

She too smiled by that same sign, but her smile was cold and fine,—

Toll slowly.

'Little hand clasps muckle gold, or it were not worth the hold

Of thy son, good uncle mine!'

XIII.

Then the young lord jerked his breath, and sware thickly in his teeth,

Toll slowly.

'He would wed his own betrothed, an she loved him an she loathed,

Let the life come or the death.'

XIV.

Up she rose with scornful eyes, as her father's child might rise,—

Toll slowly.

'Thy hound's blood, my lord of Leigh, stains thy knightly heel,' quoth she,

'And he moans not where he lies:

XV.

'But a woman's will dies hard, in the hall or on the sward'—

Toll slowly.

'By that grave, my lords, which made me orphaned
girl and dowered lady,
I deny you wife and ward!'

XVI.

Unto each she bowed her head and swept past with
lofty tread.
Toll slowly.
Ere the midnight-bell had ceased, in the chapel had
the priest
Blessed her, bride of Linteged.

XVII.

Fast and fain the bridal train along the night-storm
rode amain:
Toll slowly.
Hard the steeds of lord and serf struck their hoofs out
on the turf,
In the pauses of the rain.

XVIII.

Fast and fain the kinsmen's train along the storm
pursued amain,
Toll slowly.
Steed on steed-track, dashing off,—thickening, dou-
bling, hoof on hoof,
In the pauses of the rain.

XIX.

And the bridegroom led the flight on his red-roan steed of might,
Toll slowly.
And the bride lay on his arm, still, as if she feared no harm,
Smiling out into the night.

XX.

'Dost thou fear?' he said at last: 'Nay,' she answered him in haste,—
Toll slowly.
'Not such death as we could find—only life with one behind.
Ride on fast as fear, ride fast!'

XXI.

Up the mountain wheeled the steed—girth to ground, and fetlocks spread,—
Toll slowly.
Headlong bounds, and rocking flanks,—down he staggered, down the banks,
To the towers of Linteged.

XXII.

High and low the serfs looked out, red the flambeaus tossed about,
Toll slowly.
In the courtyard rose the cry, 'Live the Duchess and Sir Guy!'
But she never heard them shout.

XXIII.

On the steed she dropped her cheek, kissed his mane and kissed his neck,—

Toll slowly.

'I had happier died by thee than lived on, a Lady Leigh,'
Were the first words she did speak.

XXIV.

But a three months' joyaunce lay 'twixt that moment and to-day,

Toll slowly.

When five hundred archers tall stand beside the castle wall
To recapture Duchess May.

XXV.

And the castle standeth black with the red sun at its back,

Toll slowly.

And a fortnight's siege is done, and, except the duchess, none
Can misdoubt the coming wrack.

XXVI.

Then the captain, young Lord Leigh, with his eyes so grey of blee,

Toll slowly.

And thin lips that scarcely sheath the cold white gnashing of his teeth,
Gnashed in smiling, absently,

XXVII.

Cried aloud, 'So goes the day, bridegroom fair of
Duchess May!'

Toll slowly.

'Look thy last upon that sun! if thou seest to-mor-
row's one
'Twill be through a foot of clay.

XXVIII.

'Ha, fair bride! dost hear no sound save that moan-
ing of the hound?'

Toll slowly.

'Thou and I have parted troth, yet I keep my ven-
geance-oath,
And the other may come round.

XXIX.

'Ha! thy will is brave to dare, and thy new love past
compare,'—

Toll slowly.

'Yet thine old love's faulchion brave is as strong a
thing to have,
As the will of lady fair.

XXX.

'Peck on blindly, netted dove! If a wife's name thee
behove,"

Toll slowly.

'Thou shalt wear the same to-morrow, ere the grave
has hid the sorrow
Of thy last ill-mated love.

XXXI.

'O'er his fixed and silent mouth, thou and I will call back troth;'

Toll slowly.

'He shall altar be and priest,—and he will not cry at least

'I forbid you, I am loth!'

XXXII.

'I will wring thy fingers pale in the gauntlet of my mail,'

Toll slowly.

"Little hand and muckle gold" close shall lie within my hold,

As the sword did, to prevail.'

XXXIII.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,

Toll slowly.

Oh, and laughed the Duchess May, and her soul did put away

All his boasting, for a jest.

XXXIV.

In her chamber did she sit, laughing low to think of it,—

Toll slowly.

'Tower is strong and will is free: thou canst boast, my lord of Leigh,

But thou boastest little wit.

XXXV.

In her tire-glass gazëd she, and she blushed right womanly:

Toll slowly.

She blushed half from her disdain, half her beauty was so plain,

—'Oath for oath, my lord of Leigh!'

XXXVI.

Straight she called her maidens in—'Since ye gave me blame herein,'

Toll slowly.

'That a bridal such as mine should lack gauds to make it fine,

Come and shrive me from that sin.

XXXVII.

'It is three months gone to-day since I gave mine hand away:'

Toll slowly.

'Bring the gold and bring the gem, we will keep bride-state in them,

While we keep the foe at bay.

XXXVIII.

'On your arms I loose mine hair; comb it smooth and crown it fair:'

Toll slowly.

'I would look in purple pall from this lattice down the wall,
And throw scorn to one that's there!'

XXXIX.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west:
Toll slowly.
On the tower the castle's lord leant in silence on his sword,
With an anguish in his breast.

XL.

With a spirit-laden weight did he lean down passionate:
Toll slowly.
They have almost sapped the wall,—they will enter therewithal
With no knocking at the gate.

XLI.

Then the sword he leant upon, shivered, snapped upon the stone,—
Toll slowly.
'Sword,' he thought, with inward laugh, 'ill thou servest for a staff
When thy nobler use is done!

XLII.

'Sword, thy nobler use is done! tower is lost, and shame begun!'—
Toll slowly.
'If we met them in the breach, hilt to hilt or speech to speech,
We should die there, each for one.

XLIII.

'If we met them at the wall, we should singly, vainly fall,'
Toll slowly.
'But if *I* die here alone,—then I die who am but one,
And die nobly for them all.

XLIV.

'Five true friends lie for my sake in the moat and in the brake,'
Toll slowly.
'Thirteen warriors lie at rest with a black wound in the breast,
And not one of these will wake.

XLV.

'So no more of this shall be! heart-blood weighs too heavily,'—
Toll slowly.
'And I could not sleep in grave, with the faithful and the brave
Heaped around and over me.

XLVI.

'Since young Clare a mother hath, and young Ralph a plighted faith,'

Toll slowly.

'Since my pale young sister's cheeks blush like rose when Ronald speaks,

Albeit never a word she saith—

XLVII.

'These shall never die for me: life-blood falls too heavily:'

Toll slowly.

'And if *I* die here apart, o'er my dead and silent heart

They shall pass out safe and free.

XLVIII.

'When the foe hath heard it said—'Death holds Guy of Linteged,''

Toll slowly.

That new corse new peace shall bring, and a blessëd, blessëd thing

Shall the stone be at its head.

XLIX.

'Then my friends shall pass out free, and shall bear my memory,'

Toll slowly.

'Then my foes shall sleek their pride, soothing fair
my widowed bride
Whose sole sin was love of me:

L.

'With their words all smooth and sweet, they will
front her and entreat,'
Toll slowly.
'And their purple pall will spread underneath her
fainting head
While her tears drop over it.

LI.

'She will weep her woman's tears, she will pray her
woman's prayers,'
Toll slowly.
'But her heart is young in pain, and her hopes will
spring again
By the suntime of her years.

LII.

'Ah, sweet May! ah, sweetest grief!—once I vowed
thee my belief,'
Toll slowly.
'That thy name expressed thy sweetness,—May of
poets, in completeness!'
Now my May-day seemeth brief.'

LIII.

All these silent thoughts did swim o'er his eyes grown strange and dim,
Toll slowly.
Till his true men in the place, wished they stood there face to face
With the foe instead of him.

LIV.

One last oath, my friends that wear faithful hearts to do and dare!'
Toll slowly.
'Tower must fall and bride be lost—swear me service worth the cost!'
Bold they stood around to swear.

LV.

'Each man clasp my hand and swear by the deed we failed in these,'
Toll slowly.
'Not for vengeance, not for right, will ye strike one blow to-night!'
Pale they stood around to swear.

LVI.

'One last boon, young Ralph and Clare! faithful hearts to do and dare!'
Toll slowly.

'Bring that steed up from his stall, which she kissed before you all,
Guide him up the turret-stair.

LVII.

'Ye shall harness him aright, and lead upward to this height;'
Toll slowly.
'Once in love and twice in war, hath he borne me strong and far:
He shall bear me far to-night.'

LVIII.

Then his men looked to and fro, when they heard him speaking so,
Toll slowly.
''Las! the noble heart,' they thought, 'he in sooth is grief-distraught:
Would we stood here with the foe!'

LIX.

But a fire flashed from his eye, 'twixt their thought and their reply,'—
Toll slowly.
'Have ye so much time to waste? We who ride here, must ride fast
As we wish our foes to fly.'

LX.

They have fetched the steed with care, in the harness he did wear,

Toll slowly.

Past the court and through the doors, across the rushes of the floors,

But they goad him up the stair.

LXI.

Then from out her bower chambère, did the Duchess May repair:

Toll slowly.

'Tell me now what is your need,' said the lady, 'of this steed,

That ye goad him up the stair?'

LXII.

Calm she stood; unbodkined through; fell her dark hair to her shoe;

Toll slowly.

And the smile upon her face, ere she left the tiring-glass,

Had not time enough to go.

LXIII.

'Get thee back, sweet Duchess May! hope is gone like yesterday,'

Toll slowly.

'One half-hour completes the breach; and thy lord grows wild of speech—

Get thee in, sweet lady, and pray!

LXIV.

'In the east tower, high'st of all, loud he cries for steed from stall:'

Toll slowly.

'He would ride as far,' quoth he, 'as for love and victory,

Though he rides the castle-wall.'

LXV.

'And we fetch the steed from stall, up where never a hoof did fall'—

Toll slowly.

'Wifely prayer meets deathly need: may the sweet Heavens hear thee plead

If he rides the castle-wall!'

LXVI.

Low she dropt her head, and lower, till her hair coiled on the floor,

Toll slowly.

And tear after tear you heard fall distinct as any word

Which you might be listening for.

LXVII.

'Get thee in, thou soft ladye! here is never a place for thee!'

Toll slowly.

'Braid thine hair and clasp thy gown, that thy beauty in its moan

May find grace with Leigh of Leigh.'

LXVIII.

She stood up in bitter case, with a pale yet steady face
Toll slowly.
Like a statue thunderstruck, which, though quivering, seems to look
Right against the thunder-place.

LXIX.

And her foot trod in, with pride, her own tears i' the stone beside,—
Toll slowly.
'Go to, faithful friends, go to! judge no more what ladies do,
No, nor how their lords may ride!'

LXX.

Then the good steed's rein she took, and his neck did kiss and stroke:
Toll slowly.
Soft he neighed to answer her, and then followed up the stair
For the love of her sweet look:

LXXI.

Oh, and steeply, steeply wound up the narrow stair around,
Toll slowly.
Oh, and closely, closely speeding, step by step beside her treading
Did he follow, meek as hound

LXXII.

On the east tower, high'st of all,—there, where never a hoof did fall,—

Toll slowly.

Out they swept, a vision steady, noble steed and lovely lady,

Calm as if in bower or stall.

LXXIII.

Down she knelt at her lord's knee, and she looked up silently,

Toll slowly.

And he kissed her twice and thrice, for that look within her eyes

Which he could not bear to see.

LXXIV.

Quoth he, 'Get thee from this strife, and the sweet saints bless thy life!'

Toll slowly.

'In this hour I stand in need of my noble red-roan steed,

But no more of my noble wife.'

LXXV.

Quoth she, 'Meekly have I done all thy biddings under sun;'

Toll slowly.

'But by all my womanhood, which is proved so, true and good,

I will never do this one.

LXXVI.

'Now by womanhood's degree and by wifehood's verity,'

Toll slowly.

'In this hour if thou hast need of thy noble red-roan steed,

Thou hast also need of *me*.

LXXVII.

'By this golden ring ye see on this lifted hand pardiè,'

Toll slowly.

'If, this hour, on castle-wall can be room for steed from stall,

Shall be also room for *me*.

LXXVIII.

'So the sweet saints with me be,' (did she utter solemnly)

Toll slowly.

'If a man, this eventide, on this castle wall will ride,

He shall ride the same with *me*.'

LXXIX.

Oh, he sprang up in the selle and he laughed out bitter-well,—

Toll slowly.

'Wouldst thou ride among the leaves, as we used on other eves,

To hear chime a vesper-bell?'

LXXX.

She clung closer to his knee—'Ay, beneath the cypress-tree!'

Toll slowly.

'Mock me not, for otherwhere than along the green-wood fair
Have I ridden fast with thee.

LXXXI.

'Fast I rode with new-made vows from my angry kinsman's house:'

Toll slowly.

'What, and would you men should reck that I dared more for love's sake
As a bride than as a spouse?

LXXXII.

'What, and would you it should fall, as a proverb, before all,'

Toll slowly.

'That a bride may keep your side while through castle-gate you ride,
Yet eschew the castle-wall?'

LXXXIII.

Ho! the breach yawns into ruin and roars up against her suing,

Toll slowly.

With the inarticulate din and the dreadful falling in—
Shrieks of doing and undoing!

LXXXIV.

Twice he wrung her hands in twain, but the small hands closed again.

Toll slowly.

Back he reined the steed—back, back! but she trailed along his track

With a frantic clasp and strain.

LXXXV.

Evermore the foemen pour through the crash of window and door,

Toll slowly.

And the shouts of Leigh and Leigh, and the shrieks of 'kill!' and 'flee!'

Strike up clear amid the roar.

LXXXVI.

Thrice he wrung her hands in twain, but they closed and clung again,

Toll slowly.

While she clung, as one, withstood, clasps a Christ upon the rood,

In a spasm of deathly pain.

LXXXVII.

She clung wild and she clung mute with her shuddering lips half-shut;

Toll slowly.

Her head fallen as half in swound, hair and knee
swept on the ground,
She clung wild to stirrup and foot.

LXXXVIII.

Back he reined his steed back-thrown on the slippery
coping-stone;
Toll slowly.
Back the iron hoofs did grind on the battlement
behind
Whence a hundred feet went down:

LXXXIX.

And his heel did press and goad on the quivering flank
bestrode,—
Toll slowly.
'Friends and brothers, save my wife! Pardon, sweet,
in change for life,—
But I ride alone to God.'

XC.

Straight as if the Holy name had upbreathed her like
a flame,
Toll slowly.
She upsprang, she rose upright, in his selle she sate
in sight,
By her love she overcame.

XCI.

And her head was on his breast where she smiled as one at rest,—

Toll slowly.

'Ring,' she cried, 'O vesper-bell in the beechwood's old chapelle—

But the passing-bell rings best!'

XCII.

They have caught out at the rein which Sir Guy threw loose—in vain,

Toll slowly.

For the horse in stark despair, with his front hoofs poised in air,

On the last verge rears amain.

XCIII.

Now he hangs, he rocks between, and his nostrils curdle in,

Toll slowly.

Now he shivers head and hoof and the flakes of foam fall off,

And his face grows fierce and thin:

XCIV.

And a look of human woe from his staring eyes did go,

Toll slowly.

And a sharp cry uttered he, in a foretold agony

Of the headlong death below,—

XCV.

And, 'Ring, ring, thou passing-bell,' still she cried,
'i' the old chapelle!'
Toll slowly.
Then back-toppling, crashing back—a dead weight flung out to wrack,
Horse and riders overfell.

I.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,
Toll slowly.
And I read this ancient Rhyme, in the churchyard, while the chime
Slowly tolled for one at rest.

II.

The abeles moved in the sun, and the river smoôth did run,
Toll slowly.
And the ancient Rhyme rang strange, with its passion and its change,
Here, where all done lay undone.

III.

And beneath a willow tree I a little grave did see,
Toll slowly.

Where was graved,—HERE UNDEFILED, LIETH MAUD,
A THREE-YEAR CHILD,
EIGHTEEN HUNDRED, FORTY-THREE.

IV.

Then, O spirits, did I say, ye who rode so fast that day,
Toll slowly.
Did star-wheels and angel wings with their holy winnowings
Keep beside you all the way?

V.

Though in passion ye would dash with a blind and heavy crash,
Toll slowly.
Up against the thick-bossed shield of God's judgment in the field,—
Though your heart and brain were rash,—

VI.

Now, your will is all unwilled, now, your pulses are all stilled,
Toll slowly.
Now, ye lie as meek and mild (whereso laid) as Maud the child,
Whose small grave was lately filled.

VII.

Beating heart and burning brow, ye are very patient now,
Toll slowly.
And the children might be bold to pluck the kingcups from your mould
Ere a month had let them grow.

VIII.

And you let the goldfinch sing in the alder near in spring,
Toll slowly.
Let her build her nest and sit all the three weeks out on it,
Murmuring not at anything.

IX.

In your patience ye are strong, cold and heat ye take not wrong,
Toll slowly.
When the trumpet of the angel blows eternity's evangel,
Time will seem to you not long.

X.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,
Toll slowly.
And I said in underbreath,—All our life is mixed with death,
And who knoweth which is best?

XI.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang
west,

Toll slowly.

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around
our incompleteness,—

Round our restlessness, His rest.

THE ROMANCE OF THE SWAN'S NEST.

So the dreams depart,
So the fading phantoms flee,
And the sharp reality
Now must act its part.
WESTWOOD'S *Beads from a Rosary.*

I.

LITTLE Ellie sits alone
'Mid the beeches of a meadow
By a stream-side on the grass,
And the trees are showering down
Doubles of their leaves in shadow
On her shining hair and face.

II.

She has thrown her bonnet by,
And her feet she has been dipping
In the shallow water's flow:
Now she holds them nakedly
In her hands, all sleek and dripping,
While she rocketh to and fro.

III.

Little Ellie sits alone,
And the smile she softly uses
Fills the silence like a speech
While she thinks what shall be done,
And the sweetest pleasure chooses
For her future within reach. .

IV.

Little Ellie in her smile
Chooses—'I will have a lover,
Riding on a steed of steeds:
He shall love me without guile,
And to *him* I will discover
The swan's nest among the reeds.

V.

'And the steed shall be red-roan,
And the lover shall be noble,
With an eye that takes the breath:
And the lute he plays upon
Shall strike ladies into trouble,
As his sword strikes men to death.

VI.

'And the steed it shall be shod
All in silver, housed in azure,
And the mane shall swim the wind;
And the hoofs along the sod
Shall flash onward and keep measure,
Till the shepherds look behind.

VII.

'But my lover will not prize
All the glory that he rides in,
When he gazes in my face:
He will say, 'O Love, thine eyes
Build the shrine my soul abides in,
And I kneel here for thy grace!'

VIII.

'Then, ay, then he shall kneel low,
With the red-roan steed anear him
Which shall seem to understand,
Till I answer, 'Rise and go!
For the world must love and fear him
Whom I gift with heart and hand.'

IX.

'Then he will arise so pale,
I shall feel my own lips tremble
With a *yes* I must not say,
Nathless maiden-brave, 'Farewell,'
I will utter, and dissemble—
'Light to-morrow with to-day!'

X.

'Then he'll ride among the hills
To the wide world past the river,
There to put away all wrong;
To make straight distorted wills,
And to empty the broad quiver
Which the wicked bear along.

XI.

'Three times shall a young foot-page
Swim the stream and climb the mountain
And kneel down beside my feet—
'Lo, my master sends this gage,
Lady, for thy pity's counting!
What wilt thou exchange for it?'

XII.

'And the first time, I will send
A white rosebud for a guerdon,
And the second time, a glove;
But the third time—I may bend
From my pride, and answer—'Pardon,
If he comes to take my love.'

XIII.

'Then the young foot-page will run,
Then my lover will ride faster,
Till he kneeleth at my knee:
'I am a duke's eldest son,
Thousand serfs do call me master,
But, O Love, I love but *thee!*'

XIV.

'He will kiss me on the mouth
Then, and lead me as a lover
Through the crowds that praise his deeds:
And, when soul-tied by one troth,
Unto *him* I will discover
That swan's nest among the reeds.'

XV.

Little Ellie, with her smile
Not yet ended, rose up gaily,
Tied the bonnet, donned the shoe,
And went homeward, round a mile,
Just to see, as she did daily,
What more eggs were with the two.

XVI.

Pushing through the elm-tree copse,
Winding up the stream, light-hearted,
Where the osier pathway leads,
Past the boughs she stoops—and stops.
Lo, the wild swan had deserted,
And a rat had gnawed the reeds!

XVII.

Ellie went home sad and slow.
If she found the lover ever,
With his red-roan steed of steeds,
Sooth I know not; but I know
She could never show him—never,
That swan's nest among the reeds!

BERTHA IN THE LANE.

I.

Put the broidery-frame away,
For my sewing is all done:
The last thread is used to-day,
And I need not join it on.
Though the clock stands at the noon
I am weary. I have sewn,
Sweet, for thee, a wedding-gown.

II.

Sister, help me to the bed,
And stand near me, Dearest-sweet.
Do not shrink nor be afraid,
Blushing with a sudden heat!
No one standeth in the street?—
By God's love I go to meet,
Love I thee with love complete.

III.

Lean thy face down; drop it in
These two hands, that I may hold
'Twixt their palms thy cheek and chin,
Stroking back the curls of gold:
'Tis a fair, fair face, in sooth—
Larger eyes and redder mouth
Than mine were in my first youth.

IV.

Thou art younger by seven years—
Ah!—so bashful at my gaze,
That the lashes, hung with tears,
Grow too heavy to upraise?
I would wound thee by no touch
Which thy shyness feels as such.
Dost thou mind me, Dear, so much?

V.

Have I not been nigh a mother
To thy sweetness—tell me, Dear?
Have we not loved one another
Tenderly, from year to year,
Since our dying mother mild
Said with accents undefiled,
'Child, be mother to this child!'

VI.

Mother, mother, up in heaven,
Stand up on the jasper sea,
And be witness I have given
All the gifts required of me,—
Hope that blessed me, bliss that crowned,
Love that left me with a wound,
Life itself that turneth round!

VII.

Mother, mother, thou art kind,
Thou art standing in the room,
In a molten glory shrined
That rays off into the gloom!
But thy smile is bright and bleak
Like cold waves—I cannot speak,
I sob in it, and grow weak.

VIII.

Ghostly mother, keep aloof
One hour longer from my soul,
For I still am thinking of
Earth's warm-beating joy and dole!
On my finger is a ring
Which I still see glittering
When the night hides everything.

IX.

Little sister, thou art pale!
Ah, I have a wandering brain—
But I lose that fever-bale,
And my thoughts grow calm again.
Lean down closer—closer still!
I have words thine ear to fill,
And would kiss thee at my will.

X.

Dear, I heard thee in the spring,
Thee and Robert—through the trees,—
When we all went gathering
Boughs of May-bloom for the bees.
Do not start so! think instead
How the sunshine over head
Seemed to trickle through the shade.

XI.

What a day it was, that day!
Hills and vales did openly
Seem to heave and throb away
At the sight of the great sky:
And the silence, as it stood
In the glory's golden flood,
Audibly did bud, and bud.

XII.

Through the winding hedgerows green,
How we wandered, I and you,
With the bowery tops shut in,
And the gates that showed the view!
How we talked there! thrushes soft
Sang our praises out, or oft
Bleatings took them, from the croft:

XIII.

Till the pleasure grown too strong
Left me muter evermore,
And, the winding road being long,
I walked out of sight, before,
And so, wrapt in musings fond,
Issued (past the wayside pond)
On the meadow-lands beyond.

XIV.

I sate down beneath the beech
Which leans over to the lane,
And the far sound of your speech
Did not promise any pain;
And I blessed you full and free,
With a smile stooped tenderly
O'er the May-flowers on my knee.

XV.

But the sound grew into word
As the speakers drew more near—
Sweet, forgive me that I heard
What you wished me not to hear.
Do not weep so, do not shake,
Oh,—I heard thee, Bertha, make
Good true answers for my sake.

XVI.

Yes, and HE too! let him stand
In thy thoughts, untouched by blame.
Could he help it, if my hand
He had claimed with hasty claim?
That was wrong perhaps—but then
Such things be—and will, again.
Women cannot judge for men.

XVII.

Had he seen thee when he swore
He would love but me alone?
Thou wast absent, sent before
To our kin in Sidmouth town.
When he saw thee who art best
Past compare, and loveliest,
He but judged thee as the rest.

XVIII.

Could we blame him with grave words,
Thou and I, Dear, if we might?
Thy brown eyes have looks like birds
Flying straightway to the light:
Mine are older.—Hush!—look out—
Up the street! Is none without?
How the poplar swings about!

XIX.

And that hour—beneath the beech,
When I listened in a dream,
And he said in his deep speech
That he owed me all *esteem*,—
Each word swam in on my brain
With a dim, dilating pain,
Till it burst with that last strain.

XX.

I fell flooded with a dark,
In the silence of a swoon.
When I rose, still cold and stark,
There was night; I saw the moon:
And the stars, each in its place,
And the May-blooms on the grass,
Seemed to wonder what I was.

XXI.

And I walked as if apart
From myself, when I could stand,
And I pitied my own heart,
As if I held it in my hand,
Somewhat coldly, with a sense
Of fulfilled benevolence,
And a 'Poor thing' negligence.

XXII.

And I answered coldly too,
When you met me at the door;
And I only *heard* the dew
Dripping from me to the floor:
And the flowers I bade you see,
Were too withered for the bee,—
As my life, henceforth, for me.

XXIII.

Do not weep so—Dear—heart-warm!
All was best as it befell.
If I say he did me harm,
I speak wild,—I am not well.
All his words were kind and good—
He esteemed me. Only, blood
Runs so faint in womanhood!

XXIV.

Then I always was too grave,—
Liked the saddest ballad sung,—
With that look, besides, we have
In our faces, who die young.
I had died, Dear, all the same;
Life's long, joyous, jostling game
Is too loud for my meek shame.

XXV.

We are so unlike each other,
Thou and I, that none could guess
We were children of one mother,
But for mutual tenderness.
Thou art rose-lined from the cold,
And meant verily to hold
Life's pure pleasures manifold.

XXVI.

I am pale as crocus grows
Close beside a rose-tree's root;
Whosoe'er would reach the rose,
Treads the crocus underfoot.
I, like May-bloom on thorn-tree,
Thou, like merry summer-bee,—
Fit that I be plucked for thee!

XXVII.

Yet who plucks me?—no one mourns,
I have lived my season out,
And now die of my own thorns
Which I could not live without.
Sweet, be merry! How the light
Comes and goes! If it be night,
Keep the candles in my sight.

XXVIII.

Are there footsteps at the door?
Look out quickly. Yea, or nay?
Some one might be waiting for
Some last word that I might say.
Nay? So best!—so angels would
Stand off clear from deathly road,
Not to cross the sight of God.

XXIX.

Colder grow my hands and feet.
When I wear the shroud I made,
Let the folds lie straight and neat,
And the rosemary be spread,
That if any friend should come,
(To see *thee*, Sweet!) all the room
May be lifted out of gloom.

XXX.

And, dear Bertha, let me keep
On my hand this little ring,
Which at nights, when others sleep,
I can still see glittering.
Let me wear it out of sight,
In the grave,—where it will light
All the dark up, day and night.

XXXI.

On that grave drop not a tear!
Else, though fathom-deep the place,
Through the woollen shroud I wear
I shall feel it on my face.
Rather smile there, blessëd one,
Thinking of me in the sun,
Or forget me—smiling on!

XXXII.

Art thou near me? nearer! so—
Kiss me close upon the eyes,
That the earthly light may go
Sweetly, as it used to rise
When I watched the morning-grey
Strike, betwixt the hills, the way
He was sure to come that day.

XXXIII.

So,—no more vain words be said!
The hosannas nearer roll.
Mother, smile now on thy Dead,
I am death-strong in my soul.
Mystic Dove alit on cross,
Guide the poor bird of the snows
Through the snow-wind above loss!

XXXIV.

Jesus, Victim, comprehending
Love's divine self-abnegation,
Cleanse my love in its self-spending,
And absorb the poor libation!
Wind my thread of life up higher,
Up, through angels' hands of fire!
I aspire while I expire.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP.

A ROMANCE OF THE AGE.

A poet writes to his friend. PLACE—*A room in Wycombe Hall.* TIME—*Late in the evening.*

DEAR my friend and fellow-student, I would lean my spirit o'er you!
Down the purple of this chamber tears should scarcely run at will.
I am humbled who was humble. Friend, I bow my head before you:
You should lead me to my peasants, but their faces are too still.

There's a lady, an earl's daughter,—she is proud and she is noble,
And she treads the crimson carpet and she breathes the perfumed air,
And a kingly blood sends glances up, her princely eye to trouble,
And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair.

She has halls among the woodlands, she has castles by the breakers,
Sho has farms and she has manors, she can threaten and command,
And the palpitating engines snort in steam across her acres,
As they mark upon the blasted heaven the measure of the land.

There are none of England's daughters who can show a prouder presence:
Upon princely suitors praying, she has looked in her disdain.
She was sprung of English nobles, I was born of English peasants;
What was *I* that I should love her, save for competence to pain?

I was only a poor poet, made for singing at her casement,
As the finches or the thrushes, while she thought of other things.
Oh, she walked so high above me, she appeared to my abasement,
In her lovely silken murmur, like an angel clad in wings!

Many vassals bow before her as her carriage sweeps their door-ways;

She has blest their little children, as a priest or
queen were she:
Far too tender, or too cruel far, her smile upon the
poor was,
For I thought it was the same smile which she used
to smile on *me*.

She has voters in the commons, she has lovers in the
palace,
And of all the fair court-ladies, few have jewels half as
fine;
Oft the prince has named her beauty 'twixt the red
wine and the chalice:
Oh, and what was *I* to love her? my beloved, my
Geraldine!

Yet I could not choose but love her: I was born to
poet-uses,
To love all things set above me, all of good and all of
fair.
Nymphs of mountain, not of valley, we are wont to
call the Muses;
And in nympholeptic climbing, poets pass from mount
to star.

And because I was a poet, and because the public
praised me,
With a critical deduction for the modern writer's
fault,

I could sit at rich men's tables,—though the courtesies
that raised me,
Still suggested clear between us the pale spectrum of
the salt.

And they praised me in her presence;—'Will your
book appear this summer?'
Then returning to each other—'Yes, our plans are for
the moors.'
Then with whisper dropped behind me—'There he is!
the latest comer.
Oh, she only likes his verses! what is over, she endures.

'Quite low-born, self-educated! somewhat gifted
though by nature,
And we make a point of asking him,—of being very kind.
You may speak, he does not hear you! and besides,
he writes no satire,—
All these serpents kept by charmers leave the natural
sting behind.'

I grew scornfuller, grew colder, as I stood up there
among them,
Till as frost intense will burn you, the cold scorning
scorched my brow;
When a sudden silver speaking, gravely cadenced, over
rung them,
And a sudden silken stirring touched my inner nature
through.

I looked upward and beheld her: with a calm and regnant spirit,
Slowly round she wept her eyelids, and said clear before them all—
'Have you such superfluous honour, sir, that able to confer it
You will come down, Mister Bertram, as my guest to Wycombe Hall?'

Here she paused; she had been paler at the first word of her speaking,
But because a silence followed it, blushed somewhat, as for shame,
Then, as scorning her own feeling, resumed calmly—'I am seeking
More distinction than these gentlemen think worthy of my claim.

'Ne'ertheless, you see, I seek it—not because I am a woman,'
(Here her smile sprang like a fountain and, so, overflowed her mouth)
'But because my woods in Sussex have some purple shades at gloaming
Which are worthy of a king in state, or poet in his youth.

'I invite you, Mister Bertram, to no scene for worldly speeches—

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Sir, I scarce should dare—but only where God asked
the thrushes first:
And if *you* will sing beside them, in the covert of my
beeches,
I will thank you for the woodlands,—for the human
world, at worst.'

Then she smiled around right childly, then she gazed
around right queenly,
And I bowed—I could not answer; alternated light
and gloom—
While as one who quells the lions, with a steady eye
serenely,
She, with level fronting eyelids, passed out stately from
the room.

Oh, the blessëd woods of Sussex, I can hear them still
around me,
With their leafy tide of greenery still rippling up the
wind.
Oh, the cursëd woods of Sussex! where the hunter's
arrow found me,
When a fair face and a tender voice had made me mad
and blind!

In that ancient hall of Wycombe thronged the numerous guests invited,
And the lovely London ladies trod the floors with
gliding feet;

And their voices low with fashion, not with feeling, softly freighted
All the air about the windows with elastic laughters sweet.

For at eve the open windows flung their light out on the terrace
Which the floating orbs of curtains did with gradual shadow sweep,
While the swans upon the river, fed at morning by the heiress,
Trembled downward through their snowy wings at music in their sleep.

And there evermore was music, both of instrument and singing,
Till the finches of the shrubberies grew restless in the dark;
But the cedars stood up motionless, each in a moonlight-ringing,
And the deer, half in the glimmer, strewed the hollows of the park.

And though sometimes she would bind me with her silver-corded speeches
To commix my words and laughter with the converse and the jest,
Oft I sate apart and, gazing on the river through the beeches,

Heard, as pure the swans swan down it, her pure voice
o'erfloat the rest.

In the morning, horn of huntsman, hoof of steed and
laugh of rider,
Spread out cheery from the court-yard till we lost them
in the hills,
While herself and other ladies, and her suitors left
beside her,
Went a-wandering up the gardens through the laurels
and abeles.

Thus, her foot upon the new-mown grass, bareheaded,
with the flowing
Of the virginal white vesture gathered closely to her
throat,
And the golden ringlets in her neck just quickened
by her going,
And appearing to breathe sun for air, and doubting if
to float,—

With a branch of dewy maple, which her right hand
held above her,
And which trembled a green shadow in betwixt her
and the skies,
As she turned her face in going, thus, she drew me on
to love her,
And to worship the divineness of the smile hid in her
eyes.

For her eyes alone smile constantly; her lips have
serious sweetness,
And her front is calm, the dimple rarely ripples on
the cheek;
But her deep blue eyes smile constantly, as if they
in discreetness
Kept the secret of a happy dream she did not care to
speak.

Thus she drew me the first morning, out across into
the garden,
And I walked among her noble friends and could not
keep behind.
Spake she unto all and unto me—'Behold, I am the
warden
Of the song-birds in these lindens, which are cages to
their mind.

'But within this swarded circle into which the lime-
walk brings us,
Whence the beeches, rounded greenly, stand away in
reverent fear,
I will let no music enter, saving what the fountain
sings us
Which the lilies round the basin may seem pure
enough to hear.

'The live air that waves the lilies waves the slender
jet of water

Like a holy thought sent feebly up from soul of fasting saint:
Whereby lies a marble Silence, sleeping, (Lough the sculptor wrought her)
So asleep she is forgetting to say Hush!—a fancy quaint.

'Mark how heavy white her eyelids! not a dream between them lingers;
And the left hand's index droppeth from the lips upon the cheek:
While the right hand,—with the symbol-rose held slack within the fingers,—
Has fallen backward in the basin—yet this Silence will not speak!

'That the essential meaning growing may exceed the special symbol,
Is the thought as I conceive it: it applies more high and low.
Our true noblemen will often through right nobleness grow humble,
And assert an inward honour by denying outward show.'

Nay, your Silence,' said I, 'truly, holds her symbol rose but slackly,
Yet *she holds it*, or would scarcely be a Silence to our ken:
And your nobles wear their ermine on the outside, or walk blackly
In the presence of the social law as mere ignoble men.

'Let the poets dream such dreaming! madam, in these
British islands
'Tis the substance that wanes ever, 'tis the symbol
that exceeds.
Soon we shall have nought but symbol: and, for
statues like this Silence,
Shall accept the rose's image—in another case, the
weed's.'

'Not so quickly,' she retorted,—'I confess, where'er
you go, you
Find for things, names—shows for actions, and pure
gold for honour clear:
But when all is run to symbol in the Social, I will
throw you
The world's book which now reads drily, and sit down
with Silence here.'

Half in playfulness she spoke, I thought, and half in
indignation;
Friends who listened, laughed her words off, while her
lovers deemed her fair:
A fair woman, flushed with feeling, in her noble-lighted
station
Near the statue's white reposing—and both bathed in
sunny air!

With the trees round, not so distant but you heard
their vernal murmur,

And beheld in light and shadow the leaves in and
outward move,
And the little fountain leaping toward the sun-heart
to be warmer,
Then recoiling in a tremble from the too much light
above.

'Tis a picture for remembrance. And thus, morning
after morning,
Did I follow as she drew me by the spirit to her
feet.
Why, her greyhound followed also! dogs—we both
were dogs for scorning—
To be sent back when she pleased it and her path lay
through the wheat.

And thus, morning after morning, spite of vows and
spite of sorrow,
Did I follow at her drawing, while the week-days
passed along,
Just to feed the swans this noontide, or to see the
fawns to-morrow,
Or to teach the hill-side echo some sweet Tuscan in a
song.

Ay, for sometimes on the hill-side, while we sate down
in the gowans,
With the forest green behind us and its shadow cast
before,

And the river running under, and across it from the rowans
A brown partridge whirring near us till we felt the air it bore,—

There, obedient to her praying, did I read aloud the poems
Made to Tuscan flutes, or instruments more various of our own;
Read the pastoral parts of Spenser, or the subtle interflowings
Found in Petrarch's sonnets—here's the book, the leaf is folded down!—

Or at times a modern volume, Wordsworth's solemn-thoughted idyl,
Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's enchanted reverie,—
Or from Browning some 'Pomegranate,' which, if cut deep down the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a veined humanity.

Or at times I read there, hoarsely, some new poem of my making:
Poets ever fail in reading their own verses to their worth,
For the echo in you breaks upon the words which you are speaking,

And the chariot wheels jar in the gate through which
you drive them forth.

After, when we were grown tired of books, the silence
round us flinging
A slow arm of sweet compression, felt with beatings
at the breast,
She would break out on a sudden in a gush of wood-
land singing,
Like a child's emotion in a god—a naiad tired of rest.

Oh, to see or hear her singing! scarce I know which
is divinest,
For her looks sing too—she modulates her gestures on
the tune,
And her mouth stirs with the song, like song; and
when the notes are finest,
'Tis the eyes that shoot out vocal light and seem to
swell them on.

Then we talked—oh, how we talked! her voice, so
cadenced in the talking,
Made another singing—of the soul! a music without
bars:
While the leafy sounds of woodlands, humming round
where we were walking,
Brought interposition worthy-sweet,—as skies about
the stars.

And she spake such good thoughts natural, as if she
always thought them;

She had sympathies so rapid, open, free as bird on branch,
Just as ready to fly east as west, whichever way besought them;
In the birchen-wood a chirrup, or a cock-crow in the grange.

In her utmost lightness there is truth—and often she speaks lightly,
Has a grace in being gay which even mournful souls approve,
For the root of some grave earnest thought is understruck so rightly
As to justify the foliage and the waving flowers above.

And she talked on—*we* talked, rather! upon all things, substance, shadow,
Of the sheep that browsed the grasses, of the reapers in the corn,
Of the little children from the schools, seen winding through the meadow,
Of the poor rich world beyond them, still kept poorer by its scorn.

So, of men, and so, of letters—books are men of higher stature,
And the only men that speak aloud for future times to hear;

So, of mankind in the abstract, which grows slowly into nature,
Yet will lift the cry of 'progress,' as it trod from sphere to sphere.

And her custom was to praise me when I said,—'The Age culls simples,
With a broad clown's back turned broadly to the glory of the stars,
We are gods by our own reck'ning, and may well shut up the temples,
And wield on, amid the incense-steam, the thunder of our cars.

'For we throw out acclamations of self-thanking, self-admiring,
With, at every mile run faster,—'O the wondrous wondrous age!'
Little thinking if we work our SOULS as nobly as our iron,
Or if angels will commend us at the goal of pilgrimage.

'Why, what *is* this patient entrance into nature's deep resources
But the child's most gradual learning to walk upright without bane?
When we drive out, from the cloud of steam, majestical white horses,
Are we greater than the first men who led black ones by the mane?

'If we trod the deeps of ocean, if we struck the stars in rising,
If we wrapped the globe intensely with one hot electric breath,
'Twere but power within our tether, no new spirit-power comprising,
And in life we were not greater men, nor bolder men in death.'

She was patient with my talking; and I loved her, loved her certes
As I loved all heavenly objects, with uplifted eyes and hands;
As I loved pure inspirations, loved the graces, loved the virtues,
In a Love content with writing his own name on desert sands.

Or at least I thought so, purely; thought no idiot Hope was raising
Any crown to crown Love's silence, silent Love that sate alone:
Out, alas! the stag is like me, he that tries to go on grazing
With the great deep gun-wound in his neck, then reels with sudden moan.

It was thus I reeled. I told you that her hand had many suitors;

But she smiles them down imperially as Venus did
the waves,
And with such a gracious coldness that they cannot
press their futures
On the present of her courtesy, which yieldingly
enslaves.

And this morning as I sat alone within the inner
chamber
With the great saloon beyond it, lost in pleasant
thought serene,
For I had been reading Camöens, that poem you
remember,
Which his lady's eyes are praised in as the sweetest
ever seen.

And the book lay open, and my thought flew from it,
taking from it
A vibration and impulsion to an end beyond its own,
As the branch of a green osier, when a child would
overcome it,
Springs up freely from his clasping and goes swinging
in the sun.

As I mused I heard a murmur; it grew deep as it
grew longer,
Speakers using earnest language—'Lady Geraldine,
you *would!*'

And I heard a voice that pleaded, ever on in accents stronger,
As a sense of reason gave it power to make its rhetoric good.

Well I knew that voice; it was an earl's, of soul that matched his station,
Soul completed into lordship, might and right read on his brow;
Very finely courteous; far too proud to doubt his domination
Of the common people, he atones for grandeur by a bow.

High straight forehead, nose of eagle, cold blue eyes of less expression
Than resistance, coldly casting off the looks of other men,
As steel, arrows; unelastic lips which seem to taste possession
And be cautious lest the common air should injure or distrain.

For the rest, accomplished, upright,—ay, and standing by his order
With a bearing not ungraceful; fond of art and letters too;
Just a good man made a proud man,—as the sandy rocks that border
A wild coast, by circumstances, in a regnant ebb and flow.

Thus, I knew that voice, I heard it, and I could not
help the harkening:
In the room I stood up blindly, and my burning heart
within
Seemed to seethe and fuse my senses till they ran on
all sides darkening,
And scorched, weighed like melted metal round my
feet that stood therein.

And that voice, I heard it pleading, for love's sake, for
wealth, position,
For the sake of liberal uses and great actions to be
done—
And she interrupted gently, 'Nay, my lord, the old
tradition
Of your Normans, by some worthier hand than mine
is, should be won.'

'Ah, that white hand!' he said quickly,—and in his
he either drew it
Or attempted—for with gravity and instance she
replied,
'Nay indeed, my lord, this talk is vain, and we had
best eschew it
And pass on, like friends, to other points less easy to
decide.'

What he said again, I know not: it is likely that his
trouble

Worked his pride up to the surface, for she answered in slow scorn,
'And your lordship judges rightly. Whom I marry, shall be noble,
Ay, and wealthy. I shall never blush to think how he was born.'

There, I maddened! her words stung me. Life swept through me into fever,
And my soul sprang up astonished, sprang full-statured in an hour.
Know you what it is when anguish, with apocalyptic NEVER,
To a Pythian height dilates you, and despair sublimes to power?

From my brain the soul-wings budded, waved a flame about my body,
Whence conventions coiled to ashes. I felt self-drawn out, as man,
From amalgamate false natures, and I saw the skies grow ruddy
With the deepening feet of angels, and I knew what spirits can.

I was mad, inspired—say either! (anguish worketh inspiration)
Was a man or beast—perhaps so, for the tiger roars when speared;

And I walked on, step by step along the level of my passion—
Oh my soul! and passed the doorway to her face, and never feared.

He had left her, peradventure, when my footstep proved my coming,
But for *her*—she half arose, then sate, grew scarlet and grew pale.
Oh, she trembled! 'tis so always with a worldly man or woman
In the presence of true spirits; what else *can* they do but quail?

Oh, she fluttered like a tame bird, in among its forest-brothers
Far too strong for it; then drooping, bowed her face upon her hands;
And I spake out wildly, fiercely, brutal truths of her and others:
I, she planted in the desert, swathed her, windlike, with my sands.

I plucked up her social fictions, bloody-rooted though leaf-verdant,
Trod them down with words of shaming,—all the purple and the gold,
All the 'landed stakes' and lordships, all that spirits pure and ardent

Are cast out of love and honour because chancing not to hold.

'For myself I do not argue,' said I, 'though I love you, madam,
But for better souls that nearer to the height of yours have trod:
And this age shows, to my thinking, still more infidels to Adam
Than directly, by profession, simple infidels to God.

'Yet, O God,' I said, 'O grave,' I said, 'O mother's heart and bosom,
With whom first and last are equal, saint and corpse and little child!
We are fools to your deductions, in these figments of heart-closing;
We are traitors to your causes, in these sympathies defiled.

'Learn more reverence, madam, not for rank or wealth —*that* needs no learning,
That comes quickly, quick as sin does, ay, and culminates to sin;
But for Adam's seed, MAN! Trust me, 'tis a clay above your scorning,
With God's image stamped upon it, and God's kindling breath within.

'What right have you, madam, gazing in your palace mirror daily,
Getting so by heart your beauty which all others must adore,
While you draw the golden ringlets down your fingers, to vow gaily
You will wed no man that's only good to God, and nothing more?

'Why, what right have you, made fair by that same God, the sweetest woman
Of all women He has fashioned, with your lovely spirit-face
Which would seem too near to vanish if its smile were not so human,
And your voice of holy sweetness, turning common words to grace,

'What right *can* you have, God's other works to scorn, despise, revile them
In the gross, as mere men, broadly—not as *noble* men, forsooth,—
As mere Parias of the outer world, forbidden to assoil them
In the hope of living, dying, near that sweetness of your mouth?

'Have you any answer, madam? If my spirit were less earthly,

If its instrument were gifted with a better silver string,
I would kneel down where I stand, and say—Behold me! I am worthy
Of thy loving, for I love thee. I am worthy as a king.

'As it is—your ermined pride, I swear, shall feel this stain upon her,
That *I*, poor, weak, tost with passion, scorned by me and you again,
Love you, madam, dare to love you, to my grief and your dishonour,
To my endless desolation, and your impotent disdain!'

More mad words like these—mere madness! friend, I need not write them fuller,
For I hear my hot soul dropping on the lines in showers of tears.
Oh, a woman! friend, a woman! why, a beast had scarce been duller
Than roar bestial loud complaints against the shining of the spheres.

But at last there came a pause. I stood all vibrating with thunder
Which my soul had used. The silence drew her face up like a call.
Could you guess what word she uttered? She looked up, as if in wonder,

With tears beaded on her lashes, and said—'Bertram!'
it was all.

If she had cursed me, and she might have, or if even
with queenly bearing
Which at need is used by women, she had risen up
and said,
'Sir, you are my guest, and therefore I have given you
a full hearing:
Now, beseech you, choose a name exacting somewhat
less, instead!'—

I had borne it: but that 'Bertram'—why, it lies there
on the paper
A mere word, without her accent, and you cannot
judge the weight
Of the calm which crushed my passion: I seemed
drowning in a vapour;
And her gentleness destroyed me whom her scorn
made desolate.

So, struck backward and exhausted by that inward
flow of passion
Which had rushed on, sparing nothing, into forms of
abstract truth,
By a logic agonizing through unseemly demonstra-
tion,
And by youth's own anguish turning grimly grey the
hairs of youth,—

By the sense accursed and instant, that if even I spake wisely
I spake basely—using truth, if what I spake indeed was true,
To avenge wrong on a woman—*her*, who sate there weighing nicely
A poor manhood's worth, found guilty of such deeds as I could do!—

By such wrong and woe exhausted—what I suffered and occasioned,—
As a wild horse through a city runs with lightning in his eyes,
And then dashing at a church's cold and passive wall, impassioned,
Strikes the death into his burning brain, and blindly drops and dies—

So I fell, struck down before her—do you blame me, friend, for weakness?
'Twas my strength of passion slew me!—fell before her like a stone;
Fast the dreadful world rolled from me on its roaring wheels of blackness:
When the light came I was lying in this chamber and alone.

Oh, of course she charged her lacqueys to bear out the sickly burden,

And to cast it from her scornful sight, but not *beyond* the gate;
She is too kind to be cruel, and too haughty not to pardon
Such a man as I; 'twere something to be level to her hate.

But for me—you now are conscious why, my friend, I write this letter,
How my life is read all backward, and the charm of life undone.
I shall leave her house at dawn; I would to-night, if I were better—
And I charge my soul to hold my body strengthened for the sun.

When the sun has dyed the oriel, I depart, with no last gazes,
No weak moanings, (one word only, left in writing for her hands,)
Out of reach of all derision, and some unavailing praises,
To make front against this anguish in the far and foreign lands.

Blame me not. I would not squander life in grief—I am abstemious.
I but nurse my spirit's falcon that its wing may soar again.

There's no room for tears of weakness in the blind
eyes of a Phemius:
Into work the poet kneads them, and he does not
die *till then*.

CONCLUSION.

Bertram finished the last pages, while along the silence
ever
Still in hot and heavy splashes fell the tears on every
leaf.
Having ended he leans backward in his chair, with lips
that quiver
From the deep unspoken, ay, and deep unwritten
thoughts of grief.

Soh! how still the lady standeth! 'Tis a dream—a
dream of mercies!
'Twixt the purple lattice-curtains how she standeth
still and pale!
'Tis a vision, sure, of mercies, sent to soften his self
curses,
Sent to sweep a patient quiet o'er the tossing of his
wail.

'Eyes,' he said, 'now throbbing through me! are ye
eyes that did undo me?

Shining eyes, like antique jewels set in Parian statue-stone!
Underneath that calm white forehead are ye ever burning torrid
O'er the desolate sand-desert of my heart and life undone?'

With a murmurous stir uncertain, in the air the purple curtain
Swelleth in and swelleth out around her motionless pale brows,
While the gliding of the river sends a rippling noise for ever
Through the open casement whitened by the moonlight's slant repose.

Said he—'Vision of a lady! stand there silent, stand there steady!
Now I see it plainly, plainly, now I cannot hope or doubt—
There, the brows of mild repression—there, the lips of silent passion,
Curvëd like an archer's bow to send the bitter arrows out.'

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling,
And approached him slowly, slowly, in a gliding measured pace;

With her two white hands extended as if praying one offended,
And a look of supplication gazing earnest in his face.

Said he—'Wake me by no gesture,—sound of breath, or stir of vesture!
Let the blessëd apparition melt not yet to its divine!
No approaching—hush, no breathing! or my heart must swoon to death in
The too utter life thou bringest, O thou dream of Geraldine!'

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling,
But the tears ran over lightly from her eyes and tenderly:—
'Dost thou, Bertram, truly love me? Is no woman far above me
Found more worthy of thy poet-heart than such a one as *I*?'

Said he—'I would dream so ever, like the flowing of that river,
Flowing ever in a shadow greenly onward to the sea!
So, thou vision of all sweetness, princely to a full completeness
Would my heart and life flow onward, deathward, through this dream of THEE!

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept
smiling,
While the silver tears ran faster down the blushing of
her cheeks;
Then with both her hands enfolding both of his, she
softly told him,
'Bertram, if I say I love thee, . . . 'tis the vision only
speaks.'

Softened, quickened to adore her, on his knee he fell
before her,
And she whispered low in triumph, 'It shall be as I
have sworn.
Very rich he is in virtues, very noble—noble, certes;
And I shall not blush in knowing that men call him
lowly born.'

THE

RUNAWAY SLAVE AT PILGRIM'S POINT.

I.

I STAND on the mark beside the shore
Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee,
Where exile turned to ancestor,
And God was thanked for liberty.
I have run through the night, my skin is as dark,
I bend my knee down on this mark:
I look on the sky and the sea.

II.

O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you!
I see you come proud and slow
From the land of the spirits pale as dew,
And round me and round me ye go.
O pilgrims, I have gasped and run
All night long from the whips of one
Who in your names works sin and woe!

III.

And thus I thought that I would come
And kneel here where ye knelt before,
And feel your souls around me hum
In undertone to the ocean's roar;
And lift my black face, my black hand,
Here, in your names, to curse this land
Ye blessed in freedom's, evermore.

IV.

I am black, I am black,
And yet God made me, they say:
But if He did so, smiling back
He must have cast his work away
Under the feet of his white creatures,
With a look of scorn, that the dusky features
Might be trodden again to clay.

V.

And yet He has made dark things
To be glad and merry as light:
There's a little dark bird sits and sings,
There's a dark stream ripples out of sight,
And the dark frogs chant in the safe morass,
And the sweetest stars are made to pass
O'er the face of the darkest night.

VI.

But *we* who are dark, we are dark!
Ah God, we have no stars!
About our souls in care and cark
Our blackness shuts like prison-bars:
The poor souls crouch so far behind
That never a comfort can they find
By reaching through the prison-bars.

VII.

Indeed we live beneath the sky,
That great smooth Hand of God stretched out
On all His children fatherly,
To save them from the dread and doubt
Which would be if, from this low place,
All opened straight up to His face
Into the grand eternity.

VIII.

And still God's sunshine and His frost,
They make us hot, they make us cold,
As if we were not black and lost;
And the beasts and birds, in wood and fold,
Do fear and take us for very men:
Could the weep-poor-will or the cat of the glen
Look into my eyes and be bold?

IX.

I am black, I am black!
But, once, I laughed in girlish glee,
For one of my colour stood in the track
Where the drivers drove, and looked at me,
And tender and full was the look he gave—
Could a slave look *so* at another slave?—
I look at the sky and the sea.

X.

And from that hour our spirits grew
As free as if unsold, unbought:
Oh, strong enough, since we were two,
To conquer the world, we thought.
The drivers drove us day by day;
We did not mind, we went one way,
And no better a freedom sought.

XI.

In the sunny ground between the canes,
He said 'I love you' as he passed;
When the shingle-roof rang sharp with the rains,
I heard how he vowed it fast:
While others shook he smiled in the hut,
As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut
Through the roar of the hurricanes.

XII.

I sang his name instead of a song,
Over and over I sang his name,
Upward and downward I drew it along
My various notes,—the same, the same!
I sang it low, that the slave-girls near
Might never guess from aught they could hear,
It was only a name—a name.

XIII.

I look on the sky and the sea.
We were two to love, and two to pray,
Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
Though nothing didst Thou say!
Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun:
And now I cry who am but one,
Thou wilt not speak to-day.

XIV.

We were black, we were black,
We had no claim to love and bliss,
What marvel if each went to wrack?
They wrung my cold hands out of his,
They dragged him—where? I crawled to touch
His blood's mark in the dust . . not much,
Ye pilgrim-souls, though plain as *this!*

XV.

Wrong, followed by a deeper wrong!
  Mere grief's too good for such as I:
So the white men brought the shame ere long
  To strangle the sob of my agony.
They would not leave me for my dull
Wet eyes!—it was too merciful
  To let me weep pure tears and die.

XVI.

I am black, I am black!
  I wore a child upon my breast,
An amulet that hung too slack,
  And, in my unrest, could not rest:
Thus we went moaning, child and mother,
One to another, one to another,
  Until all ended for the best.

XVII.

For hark! I will tell you low, low,
  I am black, you see,—
And the babe who lay on my bosom so,
  Was far too white, too white for me;
As white as the ladies who scorned to pray
Beside me at church but yesterday,
  Though my tears had washed a place for my knee.

XVIII.

My own, own child! I could not bear
To look in his face, it was so white;
I covered him up with a kerchief there,
I covered his face in close and tight:
And he moaned and struggled, as well might be,
For the white child wanted his liberty—
Ha, ha! he wanted the master-right.

XIX.

He moaned and beat with his head and feet,
His little feet that never grew;
He struck them out, as it was meet,
Against my heart to break it through:
I might have sung and made him mild,
But I dared not sing to the white-faced child
The only song I knew.

XX.

I pulled the kerchief very close:
He could not see the sun, I swear,
More, then, alive, than now he does
From between the roots of the mango . . . where?
I know where. Close! A child and mother
Do wrong to look at one another,
When one is black and one is fair.

XXI.

Why, in that single glance I had
  Of my child's face, . . I tell you all,
I saw a look that made me mad!
  The *master's* look, that used to fall
On my soul like his lash . . or worse!
And so, to save it from my curse,
  I twisted it round in my shawl.

XXII.

And he moaned and trembled from foot to head,
  He shivered from head to foot;
Till after a time, he lay instead
  Too suddenly still and mute.
I felt, beside, a stiffening cold
I dared to lift up just a fold,
  As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

XXIII.

But *my* fruit . . . ha, ha!—there, had been
  (I laugh to think on't at this hour!)
Your fine white angels (who have seen
  Nearest the secret of God's power)
And plucked my fruit to make them wine,
And sucked the soul of that child of mine
  As the humming-bird sucks the soul of the flower.

XXIV.

Ha, ha, the trick of the angels white!
They freed the white child's spirit so.
I said not a word, but day and night,
I carried the body to and fro,
And it lay on my heart like a stone, as chill.
—The sun may shine out as much as he will:
I am cold, though it happened a month ago.

XXV.

From the white man's house, and the black man's hut,
I carried the little body on;
The forest's arms did round us shut,
And silence through the trees did run:
They asked no question as I went,
They stood too high for astonishment,
They could see God sit on his throne.

XXVI.

My little body, kerchiefed fast,
I bore it on through the forest, on;
And when I felt it was tired at last,
I scooped a hole beneath the moon:
Through the forest-tops the angels far,
With a white sharp finger from every star,
Did point and mock at what was done.

XXVII.

Yet when it was all done aright,—
Earth, 'twixt me and my baby, strewed,—
All, changed to black earth,—nothing white,—
A dark child in the dark!—ensued
Some comfort, and my heart grew young:
I sate down smiling there and sung
The song I learnt in my maidenhood.

XXVIII.

And thus we two were reconciled,
The white child and black mother, thus;
For as I sang it soft and wild,
The same song, more melodious,
Rose from the grave whereon I sate:
It was the dead child singing that,
To join the souls of both of us.

XXIX.

I look on the sea and the sky.
Where the pilgrims' ships first anchored lay
The free sun rideth gloriously,
But the pilgrim-ghosts have slid away
Through the earliest streaks of the morn:
My face is black, but it glares with a scorn
Which they dare not meet by day.

XXX.

Ha!—in their stead, their hunter sons!
Ha, ha! they are on me—they hunt in a ring!
Keep off! I brave you all at once,
I throw off your eyes like snakes that sting!
You have killed the black eagle at nest, I think:
Did you ever stand still in your triumph, and shrink
From the stroke of her wounded wing?

XXXI.

(Man, drop that stone you dared to lift!—)
I wish you who stand there five abreast.
Each, for his own wife's joy and gift,
A little corpse as safely at rest
As mine in the mangos! Yes, but *she*
May keep live babies on her knee,
And sing the song she likes the best.

XXXII.

I am not mad: I am black.
I see you staring in my face—
I know you staring, shrinking back,
Ye are born of the Washington-race,
And this land is the free America,
And this mark on my wrist—(I prove what I say)
Ropes tied me up here to the flogging-place.

XXXIII.

You think I shrieked then? Not a sound!
I hung, as a gourd hangs in the sun;
I only cursed them all around
As softly as I might have done
My very own child: from these sands
Up to the mountains, lift your hands,
O slaves, and end what I begun!

XXXIV.

Whips, curses; these must answer those!
For in this UNION, you have set
Two kinds of men in adverse rows,
Each loathing each; and all forget
The seven wounds in Christ's body fair,
While HE sees gaping everywhere
Our countless wounds that pay no debt.

XXXV.

Our wounds are different. Your white men
Are, after all, not gods indeed,
Nor able to make Christs again
Do good with bleeding. *We* who bleed
(Stand off!) we help not in our loss!
We are too heavy for our cross,
And fall and crush you and your seed.

XXXVI.

I fall, I swoon! I look at the sky.
The clouds are breaking on my brain.
I am floated along, as if I should die
Of liberty's exquisite pain.
In the name of the white child waiting for me
In the death-dark where we may kiss and agree,
White men, I leave you all curse-free
In my broken heart's disdain!

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN.

—•—

"Φεῦ, φεῦ, τι προσδέρκεσθε μ' ὀμμασιν, τέκνα;"—MEDEA.

I.

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
And *that* cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
The young birds are chirping in the nest,
The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.

II.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow
Why their tears are falling so?

The old man may weep for his to-morrow
Which is lost in Long Ago;
The old tree is leafless in the forest,
The old year is ending in the frost,
The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,
The old hope is hardest to be lost:
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
Do you ask them why they stand
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
In our happy Fatherland?

III.

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's hoary anguish draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy;
'Your old earth,' they say, 'is very dreary,
'Our young feet,' they say, 'are very weak;
'Few paces have we taken, yet are weary—
Our grave-rest is very far to seek:
Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children,
For the outside earth is cold,
And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
And the graves are for the old.'

IV.

True,' say the children, 'it may happen
That we die before our time:
Little Alice died last year, her grave is shapen

Like a snowball, in the rime.
We looked into the pit prepared to take her:
Was no room for any work in the close clay!
From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,
Crying, 'Get up, little Alice! it is day.'
If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
With your ear down, little Alice never cries;
Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
For the smile has time for growing in her eyes:
And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in
The shroud by the kirk-chime.
It is good when it happens,' say the children,
'That we die before our time.'

V.

Alas, alas, the children! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have:
They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
With a cerement from the grave.
Go out, children, from the mine and from the city,
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do;
Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty,
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through!
But they answer, 'Are your cowslips of the meadows
Like our weeds anear the mine?
Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,
From your pleasures fair and fine!

VI.

'For oh,' say the children, 'we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap;
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
We fall upon our faces, trying to go;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring,
Through the coal-dark, underground;
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.

VII.

'For all day, the wheels are droning, turning;
Their wind comes in our faces,
Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places:
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling,
Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling,
All are turning, all the day, and we with all.
And all day, the iron wheels are droning,
And sometimes we could pray,
'O ye wheels,' (breaking out in a mad moaning)
'Stop! be silent for to-day!'

VIII.

Ay, be silent! Let them hear each other breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth!
Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth!
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals:
Let them prove their living souls against the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O wheels!
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

IX.

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
To look up to Him and pray;
So the blessed One who blesseth all the others,
Will bless them another day.
They answer, 'Who is God that He should hear us,
While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?
When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word.
And *we* hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
Strangers speaking at the door:
Is it likely God, with angels singing round him,
Hears our weeping any more?

X.

'Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
And at midnight's hour of harm,
'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,
We say softly for a charm.*
We know no other words except 'Our Father,'
And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
And hold both within His right hand which is strong.
'Our Father!' If He heard us, He would surely
(For they call Him good and mild)
Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
'Come and rest with me, my child.'

XI.

'But, no!' say the children, weeping faster,
'He is speechless as a stone:
And they tell us, of His image is the master
Who commands us to work on.
Go to!' say the children,—'up in Heaven,
Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.
Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving:

* A fact rendered pathetically historical by Mr. Horne's report of his commission. The name of the poet of "Orion" and "Cosmo de' Medici" has, however, a change of associations, and comes in time to remind me that we have some noble poetic heat of literature still,—however open to the reproach of being somewhat gelid in our humanity.—1844.

We look up for God, but tears have made us blind.'
Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,
O my brothers, what ye preach?
For God's possible is taught by His world's loving,
And the children doubt of each.

XII.

And well may the children weep before you!
They are weary ere they run;
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun.
They know the grief of man, without its wisdom;
They sink in man's despair, without its calm;
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm:
Are worn as if with age, yet unretrievingly
The harvest of its memories cannot reap,—
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly.
Let them weep! let them weep!

XIII.

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in high places,
With eyes turned on Deity.
'How long,' they say, 'how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart,—

Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
And your purple shows your path!
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath."

A CHILD ASLEEP.

—✦—

I.

How he sleepeth, having drunken
Weary childhood's mandragore!
From its pretty eyes have sunken
Pleasures to make room for more;
Sleeping near the withered nosegay which he pulled
the day before.

II.

Nosegays! leave them for the waking;
Throw them earthward where they grew;
Dim are such beside the breaking
Amaranths he looks unto:
Folded eyes see brighter colours than the open ever do.

III.

Heaven-flowers, rayed by shadows golden
From the palms they sprang beneath,
Now perhaps divinely holden,
Swing against him in a wreath:
We may think so from the quickening of his bloom
and of his breath.

IV.

Vision unto vision calleth
While the young child dreameth on:
Fair, O dreamer, thee befalleth
With the glory thou hast won!
Darker wast thou in the garden yestermorn by summer sun.

V.

We should see the spirits ringing
Round thee, were the clouds away:
'Tis the child-heart draws them, singing
In the silent-seeming clay—
Singing! stars that seem the mutest go in music all the way.

VI.

As the moths around a taper,
As the bees around a rose,
As the gnats around a vapour,
So the spirits group and close
Round about a holy childhood as if drinking its repose.

VII.

Shapes of brightness overlean thee,
Flash their diadems of youth
On the ringlets which half screen thee,
While thou smilest . . not in sooth
Thy smile, but the overfair one, dropt from some ætherial mouth.

VIII.

Haply it is angels' duty,
  During slumber, shade by shade
To fine down this childish beauty
  To the thing it must be made
Ere the world shall bring it praises, or the tomb shall see it fade.

IX.

Softly, softly! make no noises!
  Now he lieth dead and dumb;
Now he hears the angels' voices
  Folding silence in the room:
Now he muses deep the meaning of the Heaven-words as they come.

X.

Speak not! he is consecrated;
  Breathe no breath across his eyes:
Lifted up and separated
  On the hand of God he lies
In a sweetness beyond touching, held in cloistral sanctities.

XI.

Could ye bless him, father—mother,
  Bless the dimple in his cheek?
Dare ye look at one another
  And the benediction speak?
Would ye not break out in weeping and confess yourselves too weak?

XII.

He is harmless, ye are sinful;
Ye are troubled, he, at ease:
From his slumber, virtue winful
Floweth outward with increase.
Dare not bless him! but be blessëd by his peace, and go in peace.

THE FOURFOLD ASPECT.

I.

When ye stood up in the house
With your little childish feet,
And, in touching Life's first shows,
First the touch of Love did meet,—
Love and Nearness seeming one,
By the heartlight cast before,
And of all Beloveds, none
Standing farther than the door;
Not a name being dear to thought,
With its owner beyond call;
Not a face, unless it brought
Its own shadow to the wall;
When the worst recorded change
Was of apple dropt from bough,
When love's sorrow seemed more strange
Than love's treason can seem now;—
Then, the Loving took you up
Soft, upon their elder knees,
Telling why the statues droop

Underneath the churchyard trees,
And how ye must lie beneath them
Through the winters long and deep,
Till the last trump overbreathe them,
And ye smile out of your sleep.
Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed as if they said
A tale of fairy ships
With a swan-wing for a sail;
Oh, ye kissed their loving lips
For the merry, merry tale—
So carelessly ye thought upon the Dead!

II.

Soon ye read in solemn stories
Of the men of long ago,
Of the pale bewildering glories
Shining farther than we know;
Of the heroes with the laurel,
Of the poets with the bay,
Of the two worlds' earnest quarrel
For that beauteous Helena;
How Achilles at the portal
Of the tent heard footsteps nigh,
And his strong heart, half-immortal,
Met the *keitai* with a cry;
How Ulysses left the sunlight
For the pale eidola race
Blank and passive through the dun light,
Staring blindly in his face;

How that true wife said to Pœtus,
With calm smile and wounded heart,
'Sweet, it hurts not!' How Admetus
Saw his blessed one depart;
How King Arthur proved his mission,
And Sir Roland wound his horn,
And at Sangreal's moony vision
Swords did bristle round like corn.
Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed, the while ye read,
That this Death, then, must be found
A Valhalla for the crowned,
The heroic who prevail:
None, be sure can enter in
Far below a paladin
Of a noble, noble tale—
So awfully ye thought upon the Dead!

III.

Ay, but soon ye woke up shrieking,
As a child that wakes at night
From a dream of sisters speaking
In a garden's summer-light,—
That wakes, starting up and bounding,
In a lonely, lonely bed,
With a wall of darkness round him,
Stifling black about his head!
And the full sense of your mortal
Rushed upon you deep and loud,

And ye heard the thunder hurtle
From the silence of the cloud.
Funeral-torches at your gateway
Threw a dreadful light within.
All things changed: you rose up straightway,
And saluted Death and Sin.
Since, your outward man has rallied,
And your eye and voice grown bold;
Yet the Sphinx of Life stands pallid,
With her saddest secret told.
Happy places have grown holy:
If ye went where once ye went,
Only tears would fall down slowly,
As at solemn sacrament.
Merry books, once read for pastime,
If ye dared to read again,
Only memories of the last time
Would swim darkly up the brain.
Household names, which used to flutter
Through your laughter unawares,—
God's Divinest ye could utter
With less trembling in your prayers.
Ye have dropt adown your head, and it seems as if ye tread
On your own hearts in the path
Ye are called to in His wrath,
And your prayers go up in wail
—'Dost Thou see, then, all our loss,
O Thou agonized on cross?

Art thou reading all its tale?'
So mournfully ye think upon the Dead!

IV.

Pray, pray, thou who also weepest,
And the drops will slacken so.
Weep, weep, and the watch thou keepest,
With a quicker count will go.
Think: the shadow on the dial
For the nature most undone,
Marks the passing of the trial,
Proves the presence of the sun.
Look, look up, in starry passion,
To the throne above the spheres:
Learn: the spirit's gravitation
Still must differ from the tear's.
Hope: with all the strength thou usest
In embracing thy despair.
Love: the earthly love thou losest
Shall return to thee more fair.
Work: make clear the forest-tangles
Of the wildest stranger-land.
Trust: the blessëd deathly angels
Whisper, 'Sabbath hours at hand!'
By the heart's wound when most gory,
By the longest agony,
Smile!—Behold in sudden glory
The TRANSFIGURED smiles on *thee!*

And ye lifted up your head, and it seemed as if He said,
'My Belovëd, is it so?
Have ye tasted of my woe?
Of my Heaven ye shall not fail!'
He stands brightly where the shade is,
With the keys of Death and Hades,
And there, ends the mournful tale—
So hopefully ye think upon the Dead!

NIGHT AND THE MERRY MAN.

NIGHT.

'NEATH my moon what doest thou,
With a somewhat paler brow
Than she giveth to the ocean?
He, without a pulse or motion,
Muttering low before her stands,
Lifting his invoking hands
Like a seer before a sprite,
To catch her oracles of light:
But thy soul out-trembles now
Many pulses on thy brow.
Where be all thy laughters clear,
Others laughed alone to hear?
Where thy quaint jests, said for fame?
Where thy dances, mixed with game?
Where thy festive companies,
Moonëd o'er with ladies' eyes
All more bright for thee, I trow?
'Neath my moon what doest thou?

THE MERRY MAN.

I AM digging my warm heart
Till I find its coldest part;
I am digging wide and low,
Further than a spade will go,
Till that, when the pit is deep
And large enough, I there may heap
All my present pain and past
Joy, dead things that look aghast
By the daylight: now 'tis done.
Throw them in, by one and one!
I must laugh, at rising sun.

Memories—of fancy's golden
Treasures which my hands have holden,
Till the chillness made them ache;
Of childhood's hopes that used to wake
If birds were in a singing strain,
And for less cause, sleep again;
Of the moss-seat in the wood
Where I trysted solitude;
Of the hill-top where the wind
Used to follow me behind,
Then in sudden rush to blind
Both my glad eyes with my hair,
Taken gladly in the snare;

Of the climbing up the rocks,
Of the playing 'neath the oaks
Which retain beneath them now
Only shadow of the bough;
Of the lying on the grass
While the clouds did overpass,
Only they, so lightly driven,
Seeming betwixt me and Heaven;
Of the little prayers serene,
Murmuring of earth and sin;
Of large-leaved philosophy
Leaning from my childish knee;
Of poetic book sublime,
Soul-kissed for the first dear time,
Greek or English, ere I knew
Life was not a poem too:—
Throw them in, by one and one!
I must laugh, at rising sun.

—Of the glorious ambitions
Yet unquenched by their fruitions;
Of the reading out the nights;
Of the straining at mad heights;
Of achievements, less descried,
By a dear few than magnified;
Of praises from the many earned
When praise from love was undiscerned:
Of the sweet reflecting gladness
Softened by itself to sadness:—

Throw them in, by one and one!
I must laugh, at rising sun.

What are these? more, more than these!
Throw in dearer memories!—
Of voices whereof but to speak
Makes mine own all sunk and weak;
Of smiles the thought of which is sweeping
All my soul to floods of weeping;
Of looks whose absence fain would weigh
My looks to the ground for aye;
Of clasping hands—ah me, I wring
Mine, and in a tremble fling
Downward, downward all this paining!
Partings with the sting remaining,
Meetings with a deeper throe
Since the joy is ruined so,
Changes with a fiery burning,
(Shadows upon all the turning,)
Thoughts of . . with a storm they came,
Them I have not breath to name:
Downward, downward be they cast
In the pit! and now at last
My work beneath the moon is done,
And I shall laugh, at rising sun.

But let me pause or ere I cover
All my treasures darkly over:

I will speak not in thine ears,
Only tell my beaded tears
Silently, most silently.
When the last is calmly told,
Let that same moist rosary
With the rest sepúlchred be.
Finished now! The darksome mould
Sealeth up the darksome pit.
I will lay no stone on it,
Grasses I will sow instead,
Fit for Queen Titania's tread;
Flowers, encoloured with the sun,
And *ai ai* written upon none;
Thus, whenever saileth by
The Lady World of dainty eye,
Not a grief shall here remain,
Silken shoon to damp or stain:
And while she lisps, 'I have not seen
Any place more smooth and clean'...
Here she cometh!—Ha, ha!—who
Laughs as loud as I can do?

EARTH AND HER PRAISERS.

I.

The Earth is old;
Six thousand winters make her heart a-cold:
The sceptre slanteth from her palsied hold.
She saith, ''Las me! God's word that I was 'good
Is taken back to heaven,
From whence when any sound comes, I am riven
By some sharp bolt; and now no angel would
Descend with sweet dew-silence on my mountains,
To glorify the lovely river fountains
That gush along their side:
I see, O weary change! I see instead
This human wrath and pride,
These thrones and tombs, judicial wrong and blood,
And bitter words are poured upon mine head—
'O Earth! thou art a stage for tricks unholy,
A church for most remorseful melancholy;
Thou art so spoilt, we should forget we had
An Eden in thee, wert thou not so sad!'
Sweet children, I am old! ye, every one,
Do keep me from a portion of my sun:

Give praise in change for brightness!
That I may shake my hills in infiniteness
Of breezy laughter, as in youthful mirth,
To hear Earth's sons and daughters praising Earth.'

II.

Whereupon a child began,
With spirit running up to man
As by angel's shining ladder,
(May he find no cloud above!)
Seeming he had ne'er been sadder
All his days than now,
Sitting in the chestnut grove,
With that joyous overflow
Of smiling from his mouth o'er brow
And cheek and chin, as if the breeze
Leaning tricksy from the trees
To part his golden hairs, had blown
Into an hundred smiles that one.

III.

'O rare, rare Earth!' he saith,
'I will praise thee presently;
Not to-day; I have no breath:
I have hunted squirrels three—
Two ran down in the furzy hollow
Where I could not see nor follow,
One sits at the top of the filbert-tree,
With a yellow nut and a mock at me:

Presently it shall be done!
When I see which way these two have run,
When the mocking one at the filbert-top
Shall leap a-down and beside me stop,
Then, rare Earth, rare Earth,
Will I pause, having known thy worth,
To say all good of thee!'

IV.

Next a lover,—with a dream
'Neath his waking eyelids hidden,
And a frequent sigh unbidden,
And an idlesse all the day
Beside a wandering stream,
And a silence that is made
Of a word he dares not say,—
Shakes slow his pensive head:
'Earth, Earth!' saith he,
'If spirits, like thy roses, grew
On one stalk, and winds austere
Could but only blow them near,
To share each other's dew;—
If, when summer rains agree
To beautify thy hills, I knew
Looking off them I might see
Some one very beauteous too,—
Then Earth,' saith he,
'I would praise . . . nay, nay—not *thee!*'

v.

Will the pedant name her next?
Crabbed with a crabbed text
Sits he in his study nook,
With his elbow on a book,
And with stately crossëd knees,
And a wrinkle deeply thrid
Through his lowering brow,
Caused by making proofs enow
That Plato in 'Parmenides'
Meant the same Spinoza did,—
Or, that an hundred of the groping
Like himself, had made one Homer,
Homeros being a misnomer.
What hath *he* to do with praise
Of Earth or aught? Whene'er the sloping
Sunbeams through his window daze
His eyes off from the learned phrase,
Straightway he draws close the curtain.
May abstraction keep him dumb!
Were his lips to ope, 'tis certain
'Derivatum est' would come.

vi.

Then a mourner moveth pale
In a silence full of wail,
Raising not his sunken head
Because he wandered last that way
With that one beneath the clay:

Weeping not, because that one,
The only one who would have said,
'Cease to weep, beloved!' has gone
Whence returneth comfort none.
The silence breaketh suddenly,—
'Earth, I praise thee!' crieth he,
'Thou hast a grave for also *me*.'

VII.

Ha, a poet! know him by
The ecstasy-dilated eye,
Not uncharged with tears that ran
Upward from his heart of man;
By the cheek, from hour to hour,
Kindled bright or sunken wan
With a sense of lonely power;
By the brow uplifted higher
Than others, for more low declining:
By the lip which words of fire
Overboiling have burned white
While they gave the nations light:
Ay, in every time and place
Ye may know the poet's face
By the shade or shining.

VIII.

'Neath a golden cloud he stands,
Spreading his impassioned hands.
'O God's Earth!' he saith, 'the sign
From the Father-soul to mine

Of all beauteous mysteries,
Of all perfect images
Which, divine in His divine,
In my human only are
Very excellent and fair!
Think not, Earth, that I would raise
Weary forehead in thy praise,
(Weary, that I cannot go
Farther from thy region low,)
If were struck no richer meanings
From thee than thyself. The leanings
Of the close trees o'er the brim
Of a sunshine-haunted stream
Have a sound beneath their leaves,
Not of wind, not of wind,
Which the poet's voice achieves:
The faint mountains, heaped behind,
Have a falling on their tops,
Not of dew, not of dew,
Which the poet's fancy drops:
Viewless things his eyes can view,
Driftings of his dream do light
All the skies by day and night,
And the seas that deepest roll,
Carry murmurs of his soul.
Earth, I praise thee! praise thou *me!*
God perfecteth his creation
With this recipient poet-passion,
And makes the beautiful to be.

I praise thee, O belovëd sign,
From the God-soul unto mine!
Praise me, that I cast on thee
The cunning sweet interpretation,
The help and glory and dilation
Of mine immortality!'

IX.

There was silence. None did dare
To use again the spoken air
Of that far-charming voice, until
A Christian resting on the hill,
With a thoughtful smile subdued
(Seeming learnt in solitude)
Which a weeper might have viewed
Without new tears, did softly say,
And looked up unto heaven alway
While he praised the Earth—
'O Earth,
I count the praises thou art worth,
By thy waves that move aloud,
By thy hills against the cloud,
By thy valleys warm and green,
By the copses' elms between,
By their birds which, like a sprite
Scattered by a strong delight
Into fragments musical,
Stir and sing in every bush;
By thy silver founts that fall,

As if to entice the stars at night
To thine heart; by grass and rush,
And little weeds the children pull,
Mistook for flowers!
—Oh, beautiful
Art thou, Earth, albeit worse
Than in heaven is callëd good!
Good to us, that we may know
Meekly from thy good to go;
While the holy, crying Blood
Puts its music kind and low
'Twixt such ears as are not dull,
And thine ancient curse!

x.

'Praisëd be the mosses soft
In thy forest pathways oft,
And the thorns, which make us think
Of the thornless river-brink
Where the ransomed tread:
Praisëd be thy sunny gleams,
And the storm, that worketh dreams
Of calm unfinishëd:
Praised be thine active days,
And thy night-time's solemn need,
When in God's dear book we read
No night shall be therein:
Praisëd be thy dwellings warm
By household faggot's cheerful blaze,

Where, to hear of pardoned sin,
Pauseth oft the merry din,
Save the babe's upon the arm
Who croweth to the crackling wood:
Yea, and, better understood,
Praisëd be thy dwellings cold,
Hid beneath the churchyard mould,
Where the bodies of the saints
Separate from earthly taints
Lie asleep, in blessing bound,
Waiting for the trumpet's sound
To free them into blessing;—none
Weeping more beneath the sun,
Though dangerous words of human love
Be graven very near, above.

XI.

'Earth, we Christians praise thee thus,
Even for the change that comes
With a grief from thee to us:
For thy cradles and thy tombs,
For the pleasant corn and wine
And summer-heat; and also for
The frost upon the sycamore
And hail upon the vine!'

THE VIRGIN MARY, TO THE CHILD JESUS.

But see the Virgin blest
Hath laid her babe to rest.
MILTON'S *Hymn on the Nativity*.

I.

SLEEP, sleep, mine Holy One!
My flesh, my Lord!—what name? I do not know
A name that seemeth not too high or low,
Too far from me or heaven:
My Jesus, *that* is best! that word being given
By the majestic angel whose command
Was softly as a man's beseeching said,
When I and all the earth appeared to stand
In the great overflow
Of light celestial from his wings and head.
Sleep, sleep, my saving One!

II.

And art Thou come for saving, baby-browed
And speechless Being—art Thou come for saving?
The palm that grows beside our door is bowed

By treadings of the low wind from the south,
A restless shadow through the chamber waving:
Upon its bough a bird sings in the sun,
But Thou, with that close slumber on Thy mouth,
Dost seem of wind and sun already weary.
Art come for saving, O my weary One?

III.

Perchance this sleep that shutteth out the dreary
Earth-sounds and motions, opens on Thy soul
High dreams on fire with God;
High songs that make the pathways where they roll
More bright than stars do theirs; and visions new
Of Thine eternal Nature's old abode.
Suffer this mother's kiss,
Best thing that earthly is,
To glide the music and the glory through,
Nor narrow in Thy dream the broad upliftings
Of any seraph wing.
Thus noiseless, thus. Sleep, sleep, my dreaming One!

IV.

The slumber of His lips meseems to run
Through *my* lips to mine heart, to all its shiftings
Of sensual life, bringing contrariousness
In a great calm. I feel I could lie down
As Moses did, and die,*—and then live most.

* It is a Jewish tradition that Moses died of the kisses of God's lips.

I am 'ware of you, heavenly Presences,
That stand with your peculiar light unlost,
Each forehead with a high thought for a crown,
Unsunned i' the sunshine! I am 'ware. Ye throw
No shade against the wall! How motionless
Ye round me with your living statuary,
While through your whiteness, in and outwardly,
Continual thoughts of God appear to go,
Like light's soul in itself. I bear, I bear
To look upon the dropt lids of your eyes,
Though their external shining testifies
To that beatitude within which were
Enough to blast an eagle at his sun:
I fall not on my sad clay face before ye,—
I look on His. I know
My spirit which dilateth with the woe
Of His mortality,
May well contain your glory.
Yea, drop your lids more low.
Ye are but fellow-worshippers with me!
Sleep, sleep, my worshipped One!

v.

We sate among the stalls at Bethlehem;
The dumb kine from their fodder turning them,
Softened their hornëd faces
To almost human gazes
Toward the newly Born:
The simple shepherds from the star-lit brooks

Brought visionary looks,
As yet in their astonied hearing rung
The strange sweet angel-tongue:
The magi of the East, in sandals worn,
Knelt reverent, sweeping round,
With long pale beards, their gifts upon the ground,
The incense, myrrh and gold
These baby hands were impotent to hold:
So let all earthlies and celestials wait
Upon Thy royal state.
Sleep, sleep, my kingly One!

VI.

I am not proud—meek angels, ye invest
New meeknesses to hear such utterance rest
On mortal lips,—'I am not proud'—*not proud!*
Albeit in my flesh God sent His Son,
Albeit over Him my head is bowed
As others bow before Him, still mine heart
Bows lower than their knees. O centuries
That roll in vision your futurities
My future grave athwart,—
Whose murmurs seem to reach me while I keep
Watch o'er this sleep,—
Say of me as the Heavenly said—'Thou art
The blessedest of women!'—blessedest,
Not holiest, not noblest, no high name
Whose height misplaced may pierce me like a shame
When I sit meek in heaven!

For me, for me,
God knows that I am feeble like the rest!
I often wandered forth, more child than maiden
Among the midnight hills of Galilee
Whose summits looked heaven-laden,
Listening to silence as it seemed to be
God's voice, so soft yet strong, so fain to press
Upon my heart as heaven did on the height,
And waken up its shadows by a light,
And show its vileness by a holiness.
Then I knelt down most silent like the night,
Too self-renounced for fears,
Raising my small face to the boundless blue
Whose stars did mix and tremble in my tears:
God heard *them* falling after, with his dew.

VII.

So, seeing my corruption, can I see
This Incorruptible now born of me,
This fair new Innocence no sun did chance
To shine on, (for even Adam was no child)
Created from my nature all defiled,
This mystery, from out mine ignorance,—
Nor feel the blindness, stain, corruption, more
Than others do, or *I* did heretofore?
Can hands wherein such burden pure has been,
Not open with the cry 'unclean, unclean,'
More oft than any else beneath the skies?
Ah King, ah Christ, ah son!

The kine, the shepherds, the abasëd wise
Must all less lowly wait
Than I, upon Thy state.
Sleep, sleep, my kingly One!

VIII.

Art Thou a King, then? Come, His universe,
Come, crown me Him a King!
Pluck rays from all such stars as never fling
Their light where fell a curse,
And make a crowning for this kingly brow!—
What is my word? 'Each empyreal star
Sits in a sphere afar
In shining ambuscade:
The child-brow, crowned by none,
Keeps its unchildlike shade.
Sleep, sleep, my crownless One!

IX.

Unchildlike shade! No other babe doth wear
An aspect very sorrowful, as Thou.
No small babe-smiles my watching heart has seen
To float like speech the speechless lips between,
No dovelike cooing in the golden air,
No quick short joys of leaping babyhood:
Alas, our earthly good
In heaven thought evil, seems too good for Thee:
Yet, sleep, my weary One!

X.

And then the drear sharp tongue of propheoy,
With the dread sense of things which shall be done,
Doth smite me inly, like a sword: a sword?
That 'smites the Shepherd.' Then, I think aloud
The words 'despised,'—rejected,'—every word
Recoiling into darkness as I view
The DARLING on my knee.
Bright angels,—move not—lest ye stir the cloud
Betwixt my soul and His futurity!
I must not die, with mother's work to do,
And could not live—and see.

XI.

It is enough to bear
This image still and fair,
This holier in sleep
Than a saint at prayer,
This aspect of a child
Who never sinned or smiled;
This Presence in an infant's face;
This sadness most like love,
This love than love more deep,
This weakness like omnipotence
It is so strong to move.
Awful is this watching place,
Awful what I see from hence—
A king, without regalia,
A God, without the thunder,

A child, without the heart for play;
Ay, a Creator, rent asunder
From His first glory and cast away
On His own world, for me alone
To hold in hands created, crying—Son!

XII.

That tear fell not on Thee,
Beloved, yet thou stirrest in thy slumber!
Thou, stirring not for glad sounds out of number
Which through the vibratory palm-trees run
From summer-wind and bird,
So quickly hast thou heard
A tear fall silently?
Wak'st thou, O loving One?—

AN ISLAND.

All goeth but Goddis will.—Old Poet.

I.

My dream is of an island-place
  Which distant seas keep lonely,
A little island on whose face
  The stars are watchers only:
Those bright still stars! they need not seem
Brighter or stiller in my dream.

II.

An island full of hills and dells,
  All rumpled and uneven
With green recesses, sudden swells,
  And odorous valleys driven
So deep and straight that always there
The wind is cradled to soft air.

III.

Hills running up to heaven for light
  Through woods that half-way ran,

As if the wild earth mimicked right
The wilder heart of man:
Only it shall be greener far
And gladder than hearts ever are.

IV.

More like, perhaps, that mountain piece
Of Dante's paradise,
Disrupt to an hundred hills like these,
In falling from the skies;
Bringing within it, all the roots
Of heavenly trees and flowers and fruits:

V.

For saving where the grey rocks strike
Their javelins up the azure,
Or where deep fissures miser-like
Hoard up some fountain treasure,
(And e'en in them, stoop down and hear,
Leaf sounds with water in your ear,—)

VI.

The place is all awave with trees,
Limes, myrtles purple-beaded,
Acacias having drunk the lees
Of the night-dew, faint-headed,
And wan grey olive-woods which seem
The fittest foliage for a dream.

VII.

Trees, trees on all sides! they combine
Their plumy shades to throw,
Through whose clear fruit and blossom fine
Whene'er the sun may go,
The ground beneath he deeply stains,
As passing through cathedral panes.

VIII.

But little needs this earth of ours
That shining from above her,
When many Pleiades of flowers
(Not one lost) star her over,
The rays of their unnumbered hues
Being all refracted by the dews.

IX.

Wide-petalled plants that boldly drink
The Amreeta of the sky,
Shut bells that dull with rapture sink,
And lolling buds, half-shy;
I cannot count them, but between
Is room for grass and mosses green,

X.

And brooks, that glass in different strengths
All colours in disorder,
Or, gathering up their silver lengths
Beside their winding border,
Sleep, haunted through the slumber hidden,
By lilies white as dreams in Eden.

XI.

Nor think each archëd tree with each
  Too closely interlaces
To admit of vistas out of reach,
  And broad moon-lighted places
Upon whose sward the antlered deer
May view their double image clear.

XII.

For all this island 's creature-full,
  (Kept happy not by halves)
Mild cows, that at the vine-wreaths pull
  Then low back at their calves
With tender lowings, to approve
The warm mouths milking them for love.

XIII.

Free gamesome horses, antelopes,
  And harmless leaping leopards,
And buffaloes upon the slopes,
  And sheep unruled by shepherds:
Hares, lizards, hedgehogs, badgers, mice,
Snakes, squirrels, frogs, and butterflies.

XIV.

And birds that live there in a crowd,
  Horned owls, rapt nightingales,
Larks bold with heaven, and peacocks proud,
  Self-sphered in those grand tails;
All creatures glad and safe, I deem:
No guns nor springes in my dream!

XV.

The island's edges are a-wing
With trees that overbranch
The sea with song-birds welcoming
The curlews to green change;
And doves from half-closed lids espy
The red and purple fish go by.

XVI.

One dove is answering in trust
The water every minute,
Thinking so soft a murmur must
Have her mate's cooing in it:
So softly doth earth's beauty round
Infuse itself in ocean's sound.

XVII.

My sanguine soul bounds forwarder
To meet the bounding waves;
Beside them straightway I repair,
To live within the caves:
And near me two or three may dwell
Whom dreams fantastic please as well.

XVIII.

Long winding caverns, glittering far
Into a crystal distance!
Through clefts of which, shall many a star
Shine clear without resistance
And carry down its rays the smell
Of flowers above invisible.

XIX.

I said that two or three might choose
Their dwelling near mine own:
Those who would change man's voice and use,
For Nature's way and tone—
Man's veering heart and careless eyes,
For Nature's steadfast sympathies.

XX.

Ourselves, to meet her faithfulness,
Shall play a faithful part;
Her beautiful shall ne'er address
The monstrous at our heart:
Her musical shall ever touch
Something within us also such.

XXI.

Yet shall she not our mistress live,
As doth the moon of ocean,
Though gently as the moon she give
Our thoughts a light and motion:
More like a harp of many lays,
Moving its master while he plays.

XXII.

No sod in all that island doth
Yawn open for the dead;
No wind hath borne a traitor's oath;
No earth, a mourner's tread;
We cannot say by stream or shade,
'I suffered *here*,—was *here* betrayed.'

XXIII.

Our only 'farewell' we shall laugh
To shifting cloud or hour,
And use our only epitaph
To some bud turned a flower:
Our only tears shall serve to prove
Excess in pleasure or in love.

XXIV.

Our fancies shall their plumage catch
From fairest island-birds,
Whose eggs let young ones out at hatch,
Born singing! then our words
Unconsciously shall take the dyes
Of those prodigious fantasies.

XXV.

Yea, soon, no consonant unsmooth
Our smile-tuned lips shall reach;
Sounds sweet as Hellas spake in youth,
Shall glide into our speech:
(What music, certes, can you find
As soft as voices which are kind?)

XXVI.

And often, by the joy without
And in us, overcome,
We, through our musing, shall let float
Such poems,—sitting dumb,—
As Pindar might have writ if he
Had tended sheep in Arcady;

XXVII.

Or Æschylus—the pleasant fields
He died in, longer knowing;
Or Homer, had men's sins and shields
Been lost in Meles flowing;
Or Poet Plato, had the undim
Unsetting Godlight broke on him.

XXVIII.

Choose me the cave most worthy choice,
To make a place for prayer,
And I will choose a praying voice
To pour our spirits there:
How silverly the echoes run!
Thy will be done,—thy will be done.

XXIX.

Gently yet strangely uttered words!
They lift me from my dream;
The island fadeth with its swards
That did no more than seem:
The streams are dry, no sun could find—
The fruits are fallen, without wind.

XXX.

So oft the doing of God's will
Our foolish wills undoeth!
And yet what idle dream breaks ill,
Which morning-light subdueth?
And who would murmur and misdoubt,
When God's great sunrise finds him out?

THE SOUL'S TRAVELLING.

Ηδη νοερους
Πετασαι ταρσους.

SYNESIUS.

I.

I DWELL amid the city ever.
The great humanity which beats
Its life along the stony streets,
Like a strong and unsunned river
In a self-made course,
I sit and harken while it rolls.
Very sad and very hoarse
Certes is the flow of souls;
Infinitest tendencies
By the finite prest and pent,
In the finite, turbulent:
How we tremble in surprise
When sometimes, with an awful sound,
God's great plummet strikes the ground!

II.

The champ of the steeds on the silver bit,
As they whirl the rich man's carriage by;
The beggar's whine as he looks at it,—
But it goes too fast for charity;
The trail on the street of the poor man's broom,
That the lady who walks to her palace-home,
On her silken skirt may catch no dust;
The tread of the business-men who must
Count their per-cents by the paces they take;
The cry of the babe unheard of its mother
Though it lie on her breast, while she thinks of the other
Laid yesterday where it will not wake;
The flower-girl's prayer to buy roses and pinks,
Held out in the smoke, like stars by day;
The gin-door's oath that hollowly chinks
Guilt upon grief and wrong upon hate;
The cabman's cry to get out of the way;
The dustman's call down the area-grate;
The young maid's jest, and the old wife's scold,
The haggling talk of the boys at a stall,
The fight in the street which is backed for gold,
The plea of the lawyers in Westminster Hall;
The drop on the stones of the blind man's staff
As he trades in his own grief's sacredness,
The brothel shriek, and the Newgate laugh,
The hum upon 'Change, and the organ's grinding,
(The grinder's face being nevertheless

Dry and vacant of even woe
While the children's hearts are leaping so
At the merry music's winding;)
The black-plumed funeral's creeping train
Long and slow (and yet they will go
As fast as Life though it hurry and strain!)
Creeping the populous houses through
And nodding their plumes at either side,—
At many a house where an infant, new
To the sunshiny world, has just struggled and cried,—
At many a house where sitteth a bride
Trying to-morrow's coronals
With a scarlet blush to-day:
  Slowly creep the funerals,
As none should hear the noise and say,
The living, the living must go away
    To multiply the dead.
  Hark! an upward shout is sent,
In grave strong joy from tower to steeple
    The bells ring out,
The trumpets sound, the people shout,
The young queen goes to her parliament:
She turneth round her large blue eyes
More bright with childish memories
Than royal hopes, upon the people;
On either side she bows her head
  Lowly, with a queenly grace,
And smile most trusting-innocent,
As if she smiled upon her mother;

The thousands press before each other
To bless her to her face;
And booms the deep majestic voice
Through trump and drum,—'May the queen rejoice
In the people's liberties!'

III.

I dwell amid the city,
And hear the flow of souls in act and speech,
For pomp or trade, for merrymake or folly:
I hear the confluence and sum of each,
And that is melancholy!
Thy voice is a complaint, O crownëd city,
The blue sky covering thee like God's great pity.

IV

O blue sky! it mindeth me
Of places where I used to see
Its vast unbroken circle thrown
From the far pale-peakëd hill
Out to the last verge of ocean,
As by God's arm it were done
Then for the first time, with the emotion
Of that first impulse on it still.
Oh, we spirits fly at will
Faster than the wingëd steed
Whereof in old book we read,
With the sunlight foaming back
From his flanks to a misty wrack,

And his nostril reddening proud
As he breasteth the steep thundercloud —
Smoother than Sabrina's chair
Gliding up from wave to air,
While she smileth debonair
Yet holy, coldly and yet brightly,
Like her own mooned waters nightly,
Through her dripping hair.

v.

Very fast and smooth we fly,
Spirits, though the flesh be by;
All looks feed not from the eye
Nor all hearings from the ear:
We can harken and espy
Without either, we can journey
Bold and gay as knight to tourney,
And, though we wear no visor down
To dark our countenance, the foe
Shall never chafe us as we go.

VI.

I am gone from peopled town!
It passeth its street-thunder round
My body which yet hears no sound,
For now another sound, another
Vision, my soul's senses have—
O'er a hundred valleys deep
Where the hills' green shadows sleep

Scarce known because the valley-trees
Cross those upland images,
O'er a hundred hills each other
Watching to the western wave,
I have travelled,—I have found
The silent, lone, remembered ground.

VII.

I have found a grassy niche
Hollowed in a seaside hill,
As if the ocean-grandeur which
Is aspectable from the place,
Had struck the hill as with a mace
Sudden and cleaving. You might fill
That little nook with the little cloud
Which sometimes lieth by the moon
To beautify a night of June;
A cavelike nook which, opening all
To the wide sea, is disallowed
From its own earth's sweet pastoral;
Cavelike, but roofless overhead
And made of verdant banks instead
Of any rocks, with flowerets spread
Instead of spar and stalactite,
Cowslips and daisies gold and white:
Such pretty flowers on such green sward,
You think the sea they look toward
Doth serve them for another sky
As warm and blue as that on high.

VIII.

And in this hollow is a seat,
And when you shall have crept to it,
Slipping down the banks too steep
To be o'erbrowzëd by the sheep,
Do not think—though at your feet
The cliff's disrupt—you shall behold
The line where earth and ocean meet;
You sit too much above to view
The solemn confluence of the two:
You can hear them as they greet,
You can hear that evermore
Distance-softened noise more old
Than Nereid's singing, the tide spent
Joining soft issues with the shore
In harmony of discontent,
And when you harken to the grave
Lamenting of the underwave,
You must believe in earth's communion
Albeit you witness not the union.

IX.

Except that sound, the place is full
Of silences, which when you cull
By any word, it thrills you so
That presently you let them grow
To meditation's fullest length
Across your soul with a soul's strength:
And as they touch your soul, they borrow

Both of its grandeur and its sorrow,
That deathly odour which the clay
Leaves on its deathlessness alwày.

x.

Alway! alway? must this be?
Rapid Soul from city gone,
Dost thou carry inwardly
What doth make the city's moan?
Must this deep sigh of thine own
Haunt thee with humanity?
Green visioned banks that are too steep
To be o'erbrowzëd by the sheep,
May all sad thoughts adown you creep
Without a shepherd? Mighty sea,
Can we dwarf thy magnitude
And fit it to our straitest mood?
O fair, fair Nature, are we thus
Impotent and querulous
Among thy workings glorious,
Wealth and sanctities, that still
Leave us vacant and defiled
And wailing like a soft-kissed child,
Kissed soft against his will?

xi.

God, God!
With a child's voice I cry,
Weak, sad, confidingly—
God, God!

Thou knowest, eyelids, raised not always up
Unto Thy love, (as none of ours are) droop
As ours, o'er many a tear;
Thou knowest, though Thy universe is broad,
Two little tears suffice to cover all:
Thou knowest, Thou who art so prodigal
Of beauty, we are oft but stricken deer
Expiring in the woods, that care for none
Of those delightsome flowers they die upon.

XII.

O blissful Mouth which breathed the mournful breath
We name our souls, self-spoilt!—by that strong passion
Which paled Thee once with sighs, by that strong death
Which made Thee once unbreathing—from the wrack
Themselves have called around them, call them back,
Back to Thee in continuous aspiration!
For here, O Lord,
For here they travel vainly, vainly pass
From city-pavement to untrodden sward
Where the lark finds her deep nest in the grass
Cold with the earth's last dew. Yea, very vain
The greatest speed of all these souls of men
Unless they travel upward to the throne
Where sittest THOU the satisfying ONE,
With help for sins and holy perfectings
For all requirements: while the archangel, raising
Unto Thy face his full ecstatic gazing,
Forgets the rush and rapture of his wings.

TO BETTINE,

THE CHILD-FRIEND OF GOETHE.

—◆—

"I have the second sight, Goethe!"—*Letters of a Child.*

I.

BETTINE, friend of Goethe,
Hadst thou the second sight—
Upturning worship and delight
With such a loving duty
To his grand face, as women will,
The childhood 'neath thine eyelids still?

II.

—Before his shrine to doom thee,
Using the same child's smile
That heaven and earth, beheld erewhile
For the first time, won from thee
Ere star and flower grew dim and dead
Save at his feet and o'er his head?

III.

—Digging thine heart and throwing
Away its childhood's gold,
That so its woman-depth might hold
His spirit's overflowing?
(For surging souls, no worlds can bound,
Their channel in the heart have found.)

IV.

O child, to change appointed,
Thou hadst not second sight!
What eyes the future view aright
Unless by tears anointed?
Yea, only tears themselves can show
The burning ones that have to flow.

V.

O woman, deeply loving,
Thou hadst not second sight!
The star is very high and bright,
And none can see it moving.
Love looks around, below, above,
Yet all his prophecy is—love.

VI.

The bird thy childhood's playing
Sent onward o'er the sea,
Thy dove of hope came back to thee
Without a leaf: art laying
Its wet cold wing no sun can dry,
Still in thy bosom secretly?

VII.

Our Goethe's friend, Bettine,
I have the second sight!
The stone upon his grave is white,
The funeral stone between ye;
And in thy mirror thou hast viewed
Some change as hardly understood.

VIII.

Where's childhood? where is Goethe?
The tears are in thine eyes.
Nay, thou shalt yet reorganize
Thy maidenhood of beauty
In his own glory, which is smooth
Of wrinkles and sublime in youth.

IX.

The poet's arms have wound thee,
He breathes upon thy brow,
He lifts thee upward in the glow
Of his great genius round thee,—
The childlike poet undefiled
Preserving evermore THE CHILD.

MAN AND NATURE.

A SAD man on a summer day
Did look upon the earth and say—

'Purple cloud, the hill-top binding,
Folded hills, the valleys wind in,
Valleys, with fresh streams among you,
Streams, with bosky trees along you,
Trees, with many birds and blossoms,
Birds, with music-trembling bosoms,
Blossoms, dropping dews that wreathe you
To your fellow flowers beneath you,
Flowers, that constellate on earth,
Earth, that shakest to the mirth
Of the merry Titan ocean,
All his shining hair in motion!
Why am I thus the only one
Who can be dark beneath the sun?'

But when the summer day was past,
He looked to heaven and smiled at last,

Self-answered so—

'Because, O cloud,
Pressing with thy crumpled shroud
Heavily on mountain top,—
Hills, that almost seem to drop
Stricken with a misty death
To the valleys underneath,—
Valleys, sighing with the torrent,—
Waters, streaked with branches horrent,—
Branchless trees, that shake your head
Wildly o'er your blossoms spread
Where the common flowers are found,—
Flowers, with foreheads to the ground,—
Ground, that shriekest while the sea
With his iron smiteth thee—
I am, besides, the only one
Who can be bright *without* the sun.'

A SEA-SIDE WALK.

I.

We walked beside the sea
After a day which perished silently
Of its own glory—like the princess weird
Who, combating the Genius, scorched and seared,
Uttered with burning breath, 'Ho! victory!'
And sank adown, an heap of ashes pale:
So runs the Arab tale.

II.

The sky above us showed
A universal and unmoving cloud
On which the cliffs permitted us to see
Only the outline of their majesty,
As master-minds when gazed at by the crowd:
And shining with a gloom, the water grey
Swang in its moon-taught way.

III.

Nor moon, nor stars were out;
They did not dare to tread so soon about,

Though trembling, in the footsteps of the sun:
The light was neither night's nor day's, but one
Which, life-like, had a beauty in its doubt,
And silence's impassioned breathings round
Seemed wandering into sound.

IV.

O solemn-beating heart
Of nature! I have knowledge that thou art
Bound unto man's by cords he cannot sever;
And, what time they are slackened by him ever,
So to attest his own supernal part,
Still runneth thy vibration fast and strong
The slackened cord along:

V.

For though we never spoke
Of the grey water and the shaded rock,
Dark wave and stone unconsciously were fused
Into the plaintive speaking that we used
Of absent friends and memories unforsook;
And, had we seen each other's face, we had
Seen haply each was sad.

THE SEA-MEW.

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO M. E. H.

I.

How joyously the young sea-mew
Lay dreaming on the waters blue
Whereon our little bark had thrown
A little shade, the only one,
But shadows ever man pursue.

II.

Familiar with the waves and free
As if their own white foam were he,
His heart upon the heart of ocean
Lay learning all its mystic motion,
And throbbing to the throbbing sea.

III.

And such a brightness in his eye
As if the ocean and the sky
Within him had lit up and nurst
A soul God gave him not at first,
To comprehend their majesty.

IV.

We were not cruel, yet did sunder
His white wing from the blue waves under,
And bound it, while his fearless eyes
Shone up to ours in calm surprise,
As deeming us some ocean wonder.

V.

We bore our ocean bird unto
A grassy place where he might view
The flowers that curtsey to the bees,
The waving of the tall green trees,
The falling of the silver dew.

VI.

But flowers of earth were pale to him
Who had seen the rainbow fishes swim;
And when earth's dew around him lay
He thought of ocean's wingëd spray,
And his eye waxëd sad and dim.

VII.

The green trees round him only made
A prison with their darksome shade;
And drooped his wing, and mournëd he
For his own boundless glittering sea—
Albeit he knew not they could fade.

VIII.

Then One her gladsome face did bring,
Her gentle voice's murmuring,
In ocean's stead his heart to move
And teach him what was human love:
He thought it a strange, mournful thing.

IX.

He lay down in his grief to die,
(First looking to the sea-like sky
That hath no waves) because, alas!
Our human touch did on him pass,
And with our touch, our agony.

FELICIA HEMANS.

TO L. E. L., REFERRING TO HER MONODY ON THE POETESS.

I.

Thou bay-crowned living One that o'er the bay-crowned Dead art bowing,
And o'er the shadeless moveless brow the vital shadow throwing,
And o'er the sighless songless lips the wail and music wedding,
And dropping o'er the tranquil eyes the tears not of their shedding!—

II.

Take music from the silent Dead whose meaning is completer,
Reserve thy tears for living brows where all such tears are meeter,
And leave the violets in the grass to brighten where thou treadest,
No flowers for her! no need of flowers, albeit 'bring flowers,' thou saidest.

III.

Yes, flowers, to crown the 'cup and lute,' since both may come to breaking,
Or flowers, to greet the 'bride'—the heart's own beating works its aching;
Or flowers, to soothe the 'captive's' sight, from earth's free bosom gathered,
Reminding of his earthly hope, then withering as it withered:

IV.

But bring not near the solemn corse a type of human seeming,
Lay only dust's stern verity upon the dust undreaming:
And while the calm perpetual stars shall look upon it solely,
Her spherëd soul shall look on *them* with eyes more bright and holy.

V.

Nor mourn, O living One, because her part in life was mourning.
Would she have lost the poet's fire for anguish of the burning?
The minstrel harp, for the strained string? the tripod, for the afflated
Woe? or the vision, for those tears in which it shone dilated?

VI.

Perhaps she shuddered while the world's cold hand
her brow was wreathing,
But never wronged that mystic breath which breathed
in all her breathing,
Which drew from rocky earth and man, abstractions
high and moving,
Beauty, if not the beautiful, and love, if not the loving.

VII.

Such visionings have paled in sight; the Saviour she
descrieth,
And little recks *who* wreathed the brow which on His
bosom lieth:
The whiteness of His innocence o'er all her garments,
flowing,
There learneth she the sweet 'new song' she will not
mourn in knowing.

VIII.

Be happy, crowned and living One! and as thy dust
decayeth
May thine own England say for thee what now for
Her it sayeth—
'Albeit softly in our ears her silver song was ringing,
The foot-fall of her parting soul is softer than her
singing.'

L. E. L.'S LAST QUESTION.

—•—

'Do you think of me as I think of you?'
From her poem written during the voyage to the Cape.

I.

Do you think of me as I think of you,
My friends, my friends?'—She said it from the sea,
The English minstrel in her minstrelsy,
While, under brighter skies than erst she knew,
Her heart grew dark, and groped there as the blind
To reach across the waves friends left behind—
'Do you think of me as I think of you?'

II.

It seemed not much to ask—as *I* of *you?*
We all do ask the same; no eyelids cover
Within the meekest eyes that question over:
And little in the world the Loving do
But sit (among the rocks?) and listen for
The echo of their own love evermore—
'Do you think of me as I think of you?'

III.

Love-learnëd she had sung of love and love,—
And like a child that, sleeping with dropt head
Upon the fairy-book he lately read,
Whatever household noises round him move,
Hears in his dream some elfin turbulence,—
Even so suggestive to her inward sense,
All sounds of life assumed one tune of love.

IV.

And when the glory of her dream withdrew,
When knightly gestes and courtly pageantries
Were broken in her visionary eyes
By tears the solemn seas attested true,—
Forgetting that sweet lute beside her hand,
She asked not,—'Do you praise me, O my land?'
But,—'Think ye of me, friends, as I of you?'

V.

Hers was the hand that played for many a year
Love's silver phrase for England, smooth and well.
Would God, her heart's more inward oracle
In that lone moment might confirm her dear!
For when her questioned friends in agony
Made passionate response, 'We think of thee,'
Her place was in the dust, too deep to hear.

VI.

Could she not wait to catch their answering breath?
Was she content, content with ocean's sound
Which dashed its mocking infinite around
One thirsty for a little love?—beneath
Those stars content, where last her song had gone,—
They mute and cold in radiant life, as soon
Their singer was to be, in darksome death?*

VII.

Bring your vain answers—cry, 'We think of thee!'
How think ye of her? warm in long ago
Delights? or crowned with budding bays? Not so.
None smile and none are crowned where lieth she,
With all her visions unfulfilled save one,
Her childhood's, of the palm-trees in the sun—
And lo! their shadow on her sepulchre!

VIII.

'Do ye think of me as I think of you?'—
O friends, O kindred, O dear brotherhood
Of all the world! what are we that we should
For covenants of long affection sue?
Why press so near each other when the touch
Is barred by graves? Not much, and yet too much
Is this 'Think of me as I think of you.'

* Her lyric on the polar star came home with her latest papers.

IX.

But while on mortal lips I shape anew
A sigh to mortal issues, verily
Above the unshaken stars that see us die,
A vocal pathos rolls; and HE who drew
All life from dust, and for all tasted death,
By death and life and love, appealing saith,
Do you think of me as I think of you?

CROWNED AND WEDDED.

I.

When last before her people's face her own fair face she bent,
Within the meek projection of that shade she was content
To erase the child-smile from her lips, which seemed as if it might
Be still kept holy from the world to childhood still in sight—
To erase it with a solemn vow, a princely vow—to rule,
A priestly vow—to rule by grace of God the pitiful,
A very godlike vow—to rule in right and righteousness
And with the law and for the land—so God the vower bless!

II.

The minster was alight that day but not with fire, I ween,
And long-drawn glitterings swept adown that mighty aisléd scene;

The priests stood stolëd in their pomp, the sworded chiefs in theirs,
And so, the collared knights, and so, the civil ministers,
And so, the waiting lords and dames, and little pages best
At holding trains, and legates so, from countries east and west;
So, alien princes, native peers, and high-born ladies bright,
Along whose brows the Queen's, now crowned, flashed coronets to light;
And so, the people at the gates with priestly hands on high
Which bring the first anointing to all legal majesty;
And so the DEAD, who lie in rows beneath the minster floor,
There verily an awful state maintaining evermore;
The statesman whose clean palm will kiss no bribe whate'er it be,
The courtier who for no fair queen will rise up to his knee,
The court-dame who for no court-tire will leave her shroud behind,
The laureate who no courtlier rhyme than 'dust to dust' can find,
The kings and queens who having made that vow and worn that crown,
Descended unto lower thrones and darker, deep adown:

Dieu et mon droit—what is 't to them? what meaning
can it have?—
The King of kings, the right of death—God's judgment
and the grave.
And when betwixt the quick and dead the young fair
queen had vowed,
The living shouted 'May she live! Victoria, live!'
aloud:
And as the loyal shouts went up, true spirits prayed
between,
'The blessings happy monarchs have be thine, O
crownëd queen!'

III.

But now before her people's face she bendeth hers anew,
And calls them, while she vows, to be her witness
thereunto.
She vowed to rule, and in that oath her childhood put
away:
She doth maintain her womanhood, in vowing love
to-day.
O lovely lady! let her vow! such lips become such
vows,
And fairer goeth bridal wreath than crown with vernal
brows.
O lovely lady! let her vow! yea, let her vow to
love!
And though she be no less a queen, with purples
hung above,

The pageant of a court behind, the royal kin around,
And woven gold to catch her looks turned maidenly to ground,
Yet may the bride-veil hide from her a little of that state,
While loving hopes for retinues about her sweetness wait.
SHE vows to love who vowed to rule—(the chosen at her side)
Let none say, God preserve the queen! but rather, Bless the bride!
None blow the trump, none bend the knee, none violate the dream
Wherein no monarch but a wife she to herself may seem.
Or if ye say, Preserve the queen! oh, breathe it inward low—
She is a *woman*, and *beloved!* and 'tis enough but so.
Count it enough, thou noble prince who tak'st her by the hand
And claimest for thy lady-love our lady of the land!
And since, Prince Albert, men have called thy spirit high and rare,
And true to truth and brave for truth as some at Augsburg were,
We charge thee by thy lofty thoughts and by thy poet-mind
Which not by glory and degree takes measure of mankind,

Esteem that wedded hand less dear for sceptre than
for ring,
And hold her uncrowned womanhood to be the royal
thing.

IV.

And now, upon our queen's last vow what blessings
shall we pray?
None straitened to a shallow crown will suit our lips
to-day:
Behold, they must be free as love, they must be broad
as free,
Even to the borders of heaven's light and earth's
humanity.
Long live she!—send up loyal shouts, and true hearts
pray between,—
'The blessings happy PEASANTS' have, be thine, O
crowned queen!'

CROWNED AND BURIED.

I.

NAPOLEON!—years ago, and that great word
Compáct of human breath in hate and dread
And exultation, skied us overhead—
An atmosphere whose lightning was the sword
Scathing the cedars of the world,—drawn down
In burnings, by the metal of a crown.

II.

Napoleon!—nations, while they cursed that name,
Shook at their own curse; and while others bore
Its sound, as of a trumpet, on before,
Brass-fronted legions justified its fame;
And dying men on trampled battle-sods
Near their last silence uttered it for God's.

III.

Napoleon!—sages, with high foreheads drooped,
Did use it for a problem; children small
Leapt up to greet it, as at manhood's call;

Priests blessed it from their altars overstooped
By meek-eyed Christs; and widows with a moan
Spake it, when questioned why they sate alone.

IV.

That name consumed the silence of the snows
In Alpine keeping, holy and cloud-hid;
The mimic eagles dared what Nature's did,
And over-rushed her mountainous repose
In search of eyries: and the Egyptian river
Mingled the same word with its grand 'For ever.'

V.

That name was shouted near the pyramidal
Nilotic tombs, whose mummied habitants,
Packed to humanity's significance,
Motioned it back with stillness,—shouts as idle
As hireling artists' work of myrrh and spice
Which swathed last glories round the Ptolemies.

VI.

The world's face changed to hear it; kingly men
Came down in chidden babes' bewilderment
From autocratic places, each content
With sprinkled ashes for anointing: then
The people laughed or wondered for the nonce,
To see one throne a composite of thrones.

VII.

Napoleon!—even the torrid vastitude
Of India felt in throbbings of the air
That name which scattered by disastrous blare
All Europe's bound-lines,—drawn afresh in blood.
Napoleon!—from the Russias west to Spain:
And Austria trembled till ye heard her chain.

VIII.

And Germany was 'ware; and Italy
Oblivious of old fames—her laurel-locked,
High-ghosted Cæsars passing uninvoked—
Did crumble her own ruins with her knee,
To serve a newer: ay! but Frenchmen cast
A future from them nobler than her past:

IX.

For verily though France augustly rose
With that raised NAME, and did assume by such
The purple of the world, none gave so much
As she in purchase—to speak plain, in loss—
Whose hands, toward freedom stretched, dropped
paralyzed
To wield a sword or fit an undersized

X.

King's crown to a great man's head. And though along
Her Paris' streets, did float on frequent streams
Of triumph, pictured or emmarbled dreams

Dreamt right by genius in a world gone wrong,—
No dream of all so won was fair to see
As the lost vision of her liberty.

XI.

Napoleon!—'twas a high name lifted high:
It met at last God's thunder sent to clear
Our compassing and covering atmosphere
And open a clear sight beyond the sky
Of supreme empire; this of earth's was done—
And kings crept out again to feel the sun.

XII.

The kings crept out—the peoples sate at home,
And finding the long-invocated peace
(A pall embroidered with worn images
Of rights divine) too scant to cover doom
Such as they suffered, cursed the corn that grew
Rankly, to bitter bread, on Waterloo.

XIII.

A deep gloom centered in the deep repose;
The nations stood up mute to count their dead:
And he who owned the NAME which vibrated
Through silence,—trusting to his noblest foes
When earth was all too grey for chivalry,
Died of their mercies 'mid the desert sea.

XIV.

O wild St. Helen! very still she kept him,
With a green willow for all pyramid,
Which stirred a little if the low wind did,
A little more, if pilgrims overwept him,
Disparting the lithe boughs to see the clay
Which seemed to cover his for judgment-day.

XV.

Nay, not so long! France kept her old affection
As deeply as the sepulchre the corse;
Until, dilated by such love's remorse
To a new angel of the resurrection,
She cried, 'Behold, thou England! I would have
The dead whereof thou wottest, from that grave.'

XVI.

And England answered in the courtesy
Which, ancient foes turned lovers, may befit,—
'Take back thy dead! and when thou buriest it,
Throw in all former strifes 'twixt thee and me.'
Amen, mine England! 'tis a courteous claim:
But ask a little room too—for thy shame!

XVII.

Because it was not well, it was not well,
Nor tuneful with thy lofty-chanted part
Among the Oceanides,—that Heart

To bind and bare and vex with vulture fell.
I would, my noble England, men might seek
All crimson stains upon thy breast—not cheek!

XVIII.

I would that hostile fleets had scarred Torbay,
Instead of the lone ship which waited moored
Until thy princely purpose was assured,
Then left a shadow, not to pass away—
Not for to-night's moon, nor to-morrow's sun:
Green watching hills, ye witnessed what was done!

XIX.

But since it *was* done,—in sepulchral dust
We fain would pay back something of our debt
To France, if not to honour, and forget
How through much fear we falsified the trust
Of a fallen foe and exile. We return
Orestes to Electra—in his urn.

XX.

A little urn—a little dust inside,
Which once outbalanced the large earth, albeit
To-day a four-years child might carry it
Sleek-browed and smiling, 'Let the burden 'bide!'
Orestes to Electra!—O fair town
Of Paris how the wild tears will run down

* Written at Torquay.

XXI.

And run back in the chariot-marks of time,
When all the people shall come forth to meet
The passive victor, death-still in the street
He rode through 'mid the shouting and bell-chime
And martial music, under eagles which
Dyed their rapacious beaks at Austerlitz!

XXII.

Napoleon! he hath come again, borne home
Upon the popular ebbing heart,—a sea
Which gathers its own wrecks perpetually,
Majestically moaning. Give him room!
Room for the dead in Paris! welcome solemn
And grave-deep, 'neath the cannon-moulded column!

XXIII.

There, weapon spent and warrior spent may rest
From roar of fields,—provided Jupiter
Dare trust Saturnus to lie down so near
His bolts!—and this he may: for, dispossessed
Of any godship lies the godlike arm—
The goat, Jove sucked, as likely to do harm.

XXIV.

And yet . . . Napoleon!—the recovered name
Shakes the old casements of the world; and we
Look out upon the passing pageantry,

* It was the first intention to bury him under the column.

Attesting that the Dead makes good his claim
To a French grave,—another kingdom won,
The last, of few spans—by Napoleon.

XXV.

Blood fell like dew beneath his sunrise—sooth!
But glittered dew-like in the covenanted
Meridian light. He was a despot—granted!
But the αὐτος of his autocratic mouth
Said yea i' the people's French; he magnified
The image of the freedom he denied:

XXVI.

And if they asked for rights, he made reply
'Ye have my glory!'—and so, drawing round them
His ample purple, glorified and bound them
In an embrace that seemed identity.
He ruled them like a tyrant—true! but none
Were ruled like slaves: each felt Napoleon.

XXVII.

I do not praise this man: the man was flawed
For Adam—much more, Christ!—his knee unbent,
His hand unclean, his aspiration pent
Within a sword-sweep—pshaw!—but since he had
The genius to be loved, why let him have
The justice to be honoured in his grave.

XXVIII.

I think this nation's tears thus poured together,
Better than shouts.' I think this funeral
Grander than crownings, though a Pope bless all.
I think this grave stronger than thrones. But whether
The crowned Napoleon or the buried clay
Be worthier, I discern not: angels may.

TO FLUSH, MY DOG.

I.

Loving friend, the gift of one
Who her own true faith has run
Through thy lower nature,*
Be my benediction said
With my hand upon thy head,
Gentle fellow-creature!

II.

Like a lady's ringlets brown,
Flow thy silken ears adown
Either side demurely
Of thy silver-suited breast
Shining out from all the rest
Of thy body purely.

* This dog was the gift of my dear and admired friend, Miss Mitford, and belongs to the beautiful race she has rendered celebrated among English and American readers. The Flushes have their laurels as well as the Cæsars,—the chief difference (at least the very head and front of it) consisting, perhaps, in the bald head of the latter under the crown. 1844.

III.

Darkly brown thy body is,
Till the sunshine striking this
Alchemize its dulness,
When the sleek curls manifold
Flash all over into gold
With a burnished fulness.

IV.

Underneath my stroking hand,
Startled eyes of hazel bland
Kindling, growing larger,
Up thou leapest with a spring,
Full of prank and curveting,
Leaping like a charger.

V.

Leap! thy broad tail waves a light,
Leap! thy slender feet are bright,
Canopied in fringes;
Leap! those tasselled ears of thine
Flicker strangely, fair and fine
Down their golden inches.

VI.

Yet, my pretty, sportive friend,
Little is 't to such an end
That I praise thy rareness;
Other dogs may be thy peers
Haply in these drooping ears
And this glossy fairness.

VII.

But of *thee* it shall be said.
This dog watched beside a bed
Day and night unweary,
Watched within a curtained room
Where no sunbeam brake the gloom
Round the sick and dreary.

VIII.

Roses, gathered for a vase,
In that chamber died apace,
Beam and breeze resigning
This dog only, waited on,
Knowing that when light is gone
Love remains for shining.

IX.

Other dogs in thymy dew
Tracked the hares and followed through
Sunny moor or meadow;
This dog only, crept and crept
Next a languid cheek that slept,
Sharing in the shadow.

X.

Other dogs of loyal cheer
Bounded at the whistle clear,
Up the woodside hieing;
This dog only, watched in reach
Of a faintly uttered speech
Or a louder sighing.

XI.

And if one or two quick tears
Dropped upon his glossy ears
Or a sigh came double,
Up he sprang in eager haste,
Fawning, fondling, breathing fast,
In a tender trouble.

XII.

And this dog was satisfied
If a pale thin hand would glide
Down his dewlaps sloping,—
Which he pushed his nose within,
After,—platforming his chin
On the palm left open.

XIII.

This dog, if a friendly voice
Call him now to blither choice
Than such chamber-keeping,
'Come out!' praying from the door,—
Presseth backward as before,
Up against me leaping.

XIV.

Therefore to this dog will I,
Tenderly not scornfully,
Render praise and favour:
With my hand upon his head,
Is my benediction said
Therefore and for ever.

XV.

And because he loves me so,
Better than his kind will do
Often man or woman,
Give I back more love again
Than dogs often take of men,
Leaning from my Human.

XVI.

Blessings on thee, dog of mine,
Pretty collars make thee fine,
Sugared milk make fat thee!
Pleasures wag on in thy tail,
Hands of gentle motion fail
Nevermore, to pat thee!

XVII.

Downy pillow take thy head;
Silken coverlid bestead,
Sunshine help thy sleeping!
No fly's buzzing wake thee up,
No man break thy purple cup
Set for drinking deep in.

XVIII.

Whiskered cats arointed flee,
Sturdy stoppers keep from thee
Cologne distillations;
Nuts lie in thy path for stones,
And thy feast-day macaroons
Turn to daily rations!

XIX.

Mock I thee, in wishing weal? —
Tears are in my eyes to feel
  Thou art made so straightly,
Blessing needs must straighten too,—
Little canst thou joy or do,
  Thou who lovest *greatly*.

XX.

Let be blessëd to the height
Of all good and all delight
  Pervious to thy nature;
Only *loved* beyond that line,
With a love that answers thine,
  Loving fellow-creature!

THE DESERTED GARDEN.

—•—

I MIND me in the days departed,
How often underneath the sun
With childish bounds I used to run
To a garden long deserted.

The beds and walks were vanished quite;
And wheresoe'er had struck the spade,
The greenest grasses Nature laid
To sanctify her right.

I called the place my wilderness,
For no one entered there but I;
The sheep looked in, the grass to espy,
And passed it ne'ertheless.

The trees were interwoven wild,
And spread their boughs enough about
To keep both sheep and shepherd out,
But not a happy child.

Adventurous joy it was for me!
I crept beneath the boughs, and found
A circle smooth of mossy ground
Beneath a poplar tree.

Old garden rose-trees hedged it in,
Bedropt with roses waxen-white
Well satisfied with dew and light
And careless to be seen

Long years ago it might befall,
When all the garden flowers were trim,
The grave old gardener prided him
On these the most of all.

Some lady, stately overmuch,
Here moving with a silken noise,
Has blushed beside them at the voice
That likened her to such.

And these, to make a diadem,
She often may have plucked and twined,
Half-smiling as it came to mind
That few would look at *them*.

Oh, little thought that lady proud,
A child would watch her fair white rose,
When buried lay her whiter brows,
And silk was changed for shroud!

Nor thought that gardener, (full of scorns
For men unlearned and simple phrase,)
A child would bring it all its praise
By creeping through the thorns!

To me upon my low moss seat,
Though never a dream the roses sent
Of science or love's compliment,
I ween they smelt as sweet.

It did not move my grief to see
The trace of human step departed:
Because the garden was deserted,
The blither place for me!

Friends, blame me not! a narrow ken,
Has childhood twixt the sun and sward;
We draw the moral afterward,
We feel the gladness then.

And gladdest hours for me did glide
In silence at the rose-tree wall:
A thrush made gladness musical
Upon the other side.

Nor he nor I did e'er incline
To peck or pluck the blossoms white;
How should I know but roses might
Lead lives as glad as mine?

To make my hermit-home complete,
I brought clear water from the spring
Praised in its own low murmuring,
And cresses glossy wet.

And so, I thought, my likeness grew
(Without the melancholy tale)
To 'gentle hermit of the dale,'
And Angelina too.

For oft I read within my nook
Such minstrel stories; till the breeze
Made sounds poetic in the trees,
And then I shut the book.

If I shut this wherein I write
I hear no more the wind athwart
Those trees, nor feel that childish heart
Delighting in delight.

My childhood from my life is parted,
My footstep from the moss which drew
Its fairy circle round: anew
The garden is deserted.

Another thrush may there rehearse
The madrigals which sweetest are;
No more for me! myself afar
Do sing a sadder verse.

Ah me, ah me! when erst I lay
In that child's-nest so greenly wrought,
I laughed unto myself and thought
'The time will pass away.'

And still I laughed, and did not fear
But that, whene'er was past away
The childish time, some happier play
My womanhood would cheer.

I knew the time would pass away,
And yet, beside the rose-tree wall,
Dear God, how seldom, if at all,
Did I look up to pray!

The time is past; and now that grows
The cypress high among the trees,
And I behold white sepulchres
As well as the white rose,—

When graver, meeker thoughts are given,
And I have learnt to lift my face,
Reminded how earth's greenest place
The colour draws from heaven,—

It something saith for earthly pain,
But more for Heavenly promise free,
That I who was, would shrink to be
That happy child again.

MY DOVES.

O Weisheit! Du red'st wie eine Taube!—Goethe.

My little doves have left a nest
  Upon an Indian tree
Whose leaves fantastic take their rest
  Or motion from the sea;
For, ever there the sea-winds go
With sunlit paces to and fro.

The tropic flowers looked up to it,
  The tropic stars looked down,
And there my little doves did sit
  With feathers softly brown,
And glittering eyes that showed their right
To general Nature's deep delight.

And God them taught, at every close
  Of murmuring waves beyond
And green leaves round, to interpose
  Their choral voices fond,
Interpreting that love must be
The meaning of the earth and sea.

Fit ministers! Of living loves
  Theirs hath the calmest fashion,
Their living voice the likest moves
  To lifeless intonation,
The lovely monotone of springs
And winds and such insensate things.

My little doves were ta'en away
  From that glad nest of theirs,
Across an ocean rolling grey,
  And tempest-clouded airs;
My little doves, who lately knew
The sky and wave by warmth and blue.

And now, within the city prison,
  In mist and chillness pent,
With sudden upward look they listen
  For sounds of past content,
For lapse of water, swell of breeze,
Or nut-fruit falling from the trees.

The stir without the glow of passion,
  The triumph of the mart,
The gold and silver as they clash on
  Man's cold metallic heart,
The roar of wheels, the cry for bread,
These only sounds are heard instead.

Yet still, as on my human hand
Their fearless heads they lean,
And almost seem to understand
What human musings mean,
(Their eyes with such a plaintive shine
Are fastened upwardly to mine!)

Soft falls their chant as on the nest
Beneath the sunny zone;
For love that stirred it in their breast
Has not aweary grown,
And 'neath the city's shade can keep
The well of music clear and deep.

And love that keeps the music, fills
With pastoral memories;
All echoings from out the hills,
All droppings from the skies,
All flowings from the wave and wind,
Remembered in their chant, I find.

So teach ye me the wisest part,
My little doves! to move
Along the city-ways with heart
Assured by holy love,
And vocal with such songs as own
A fountain to the world unknown.

'Twas hard to sing by Babel's stream—
More hard, in Babel's street:
But if the soulless creatures deem
Their music not unmeet
For sunless walls—let *us* begin,
Who wear immortal wings within!

To me, fair memories belong
Of scenes that used to bless,
For no regret, but present song
And lasting thankfulness,
And very soon to break away,
Like types, in purer things than they.

I will have hopes that cannot fade,
For flowers the valley yields;
I will have humble thoughts instead
Of silent, dewy fields:
My spirit and my God shall be
My sea-ward hill, my boundless sea.

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN.

I.

Nine years old! The first of any
Seem the happiest years that come:
Yet when *I* was nine, I said
No such word! I thought instead
That the Greeks had used as many
In besieging Ilium.

II.

Nine green years had scarcely brought me
To my childhood's haunted spring;
I had life, like flowers and bees
In betwixt the country trees,
And the sun the pleasure taught me
Which he teacheth every thing.

III.

If the rain fell, there was sorrow,
Little head leant on the pane,
Little finger drawing down it
The long trailing drops upon it,
And the 'Rain, rain, come to-morrow,'
Said for charm against the rain.

IV.

Such a charm was right Canidian
Though you meet it with a jeer!
If I said it long enough,
Then the rain hummed dimly off
And the thrush with his pure Lydian
Was left only to the ear;

V.

And the sun and I together
Went a-rushing out of doors:
We our tender spirits drew
Over hill and dale in view,
Glimmering hither, glimmering thither,
In the footsteps of the showers.

VI.

Underneath the chestnuts dripping,
Through the grasses wet and fair,
Straight I sought my garden-ground
With the laurel on the mound,
And the pear-tree oversweeping
A side-shadow of green air.

VII.

In the garden lay supinely
A huge giant wrought of spade!
Arms and legs were stretched at length
In a passive giant strength,—
The fine meadow turf, cut finely,
Round them laid and interlaid.

VIII.

Call him Hector, son of Priam!
Such his title and degree.
With my rake I smoothed his brow,
Both his cheeks I weeded through,
But a rhymer such as I am,
Scarce can sing his dignity.

IX.

Eyes of gentianellas azure,
Staring, winking at the skies;
Nose of gillyflowers and box;
Scented grasses put for locks,
Which a little breeze at pleasure
Set a-waving round his eyes:

X.

Brazen helm of daffodillies,
With a glitter toward the light;
Purple violets for the mouth,
Breathing perfumes west and south;
And a sword of flashing lilies,
Holden ready for the fight:

XI.

And a breastplate made of daisies,
Closely fitting, leaf on leaf;
Periwinkles interlaced
Drawn for belt about the waist;
While the brown bees, humming praises,
Shot their arrows round the chief.

XII.

And who knows, (I sometimes wondered,)
If the disembodied soul
Of old Hector, once of Troy,
Might not take a dreary joy
Here to enter—if it thundered,
Rolling up the thunder-roll?

XIII.

Rolling this way from Troy-ruin,
In this body rude and rife
Just to enter, and take rest
'Neath the daisies of the breast—
They, with tender roots, renewing
His heroic heart to life?

XIV.

Who could know? I sometimes started
At a motion or a sound!
Did his mouth speak—naming Troy
With an ototototoi?
Did the pulse of the Strong-hearted
Make the daisies tremble round?

XV.

It was hard to answer, often:
But the birds sang in the tree,
But the little birds sang bold
In the pear-tree green and old,
And my terror seemed to soften
Through the courage of their glee.

XVI.

Oh, the birds, the tree, the ruddy
And white blossoms sleek with rain!
Oh, my garden rich with pansies!
Oh, my childhood's bright romances!
All revive, like Hector's body,
And I see them stir again.

XVII.

And despite life's changes, chances,
And despite the deathbell's toll,
They press on me in full seeming:
Help, some angel! stay this dreaming!
As the birds sang in the branches,
Sing God's patience through my soul!

XVIII.

That no dreamer, no neglecter
Of the present's work unsped,
I may wake up and be doing,
Life's heroic ends pursuing,
Though my past is dead as Hector,
And though Hector is twice dead.

SLEEPING AND WATCHING.

I.

Sleep on, baby, on the floor,
Tired of all the playing:
Sleep with smile the sweeter for
That, you dropped away in.
On your curls' full roundness stand
Golden lights serenely;
One cheek, pushed out by the hand,
Folds the dimple inly:
Little head and little foot
Heavy laid for pleasure,
Underneath the lids half shut,
Slants the shining azure.
Open-soul in noonday sun,
So you lie and slumber:
Nothing evil having done,
Nothing can encumber.

II.

I, who cannot sleep as well,
Shall I sigh to view you?
Or sigh further to foretell
All that may undo you?
Nay, keep smiling, little child,
Ere the sorrow neareth:
I will smile too! patience mild
Pleasure's token weareth.
Nay, keep sleeping before loss:
I shall sleep though losing!
As by cradle, so by cross,
Sure is the reposing.

III.

And God knows who sees us twain,
Child at childish leisure,
I am near as tired of pain
As you seem of pleasure.
Very soon too, by His grace
Gently wrapt around me,
Shall I show as calm a face,
Shall I sleep as soundly.
Differing in this, that you
Clasp your playthings, sleeping,
While my hand shall drop the few
Given to my keeping:
Differing in this, that I
Sleeping shall be colder,

And in waking presently,
  Brighter to beholder;
Differing in this beside
  (Sleeper, have you heard me?
Do you move, and open wide
  Eyes of wonder toward me?)—
That while you I thus recall
  From your sleep, I solely,
Me from mine an angel shall,
  With reveillie holy.

SOUNDS.

Ηκουσας η ουκ ηκουσας ;——
ÆSCHYLUS.

I.

HARKEN, harken!
The rapid river carrieth
Many noises underneath
The hoary ocean:
Teaching his solemnity
Sounds of inland life and glee
Learnt beside the waving tree
When the winds in summer prank
Toss the shades from bank to bank,
And the quick rains, in emotion
Which rather gladdens earth than grieves,
Count and visibly rehearse
The pulses of the universe
Upon the summer leaves—
Learnt among the lilies straight,
When they bow them to the weight
Of many bees whose hidden hum
Seemeth from themselves to come—

Learnt among the grasses green
Where the rustling mice are seen
By the gleaming, as they run,
Of their quick eyes in the sun;
And lazy sheep are browzing through
With their noses trailed in dew;
And the squirrel leaps adown
Holding fast the filbert brown;
And the lark, with more of mirth
In his song than suits the earth,
Droppeth some in soaring high,
To pour the rest out in the sky;
While the woodland doves apart
In the copse's leafy heart,
Solitary, not ascetic,
Hidden and yet vocal, seem
Joining, in a lovely psalm,
Man's despondence, nature's calm,
Half mystical and half pathetic,
Like a singing in a dream.*
All these sounds the river telleth,

* 'While floating up bright forms ideal,
Mistress or friend, around me stream;
Half sense-supplied, and half unreal,
Like music mingling with a dream.'
John Kenyon.

I do not doubt that the 'music' of the two concluding lines mingled, though very unconsciously, with my own 'dream,' and gave their form and pressure to the above distich. The ideas however being sufficiently distinct, I am satisfied with sending this note to the press after my verses, and with acknowledging another obligation to the valued friend to whom I already owe so many. 1844.

Softened to an undertone
Which ever and anon he swelleth
By a burden of his own,
In the ocean's ear:
Ay, and ocean seems to hear
With an inward gentle scorn,
Smiling to his caverns worn.

III.

Harken, harken!
The child is shouting at his play
Just in the tramping funeral's way;
The widow moans as she turns aside
To shun the face of the blushing bride
While, shaking the tower of the ancient church,
The marriage bells do swing;
And in the shadow of the porch
An idiot sits with his lean hands full
Of hedgerow flowers and a poet's skull,
Laughing loud and gibbering
Because it is so brown a thing,
While he sticketh the gaudy poppies red
In and out the senseless head
Where all sweet fancies grew instead:
And you may hear at the self-same time
Another poet who reads his rhyme,
Low as a brook in summer air,
Save when he droppeth his voice adown
To dream of the amaranthine crown

His mortal brows shall wear:
And a baby cries with a feeble sound
'Neath the weary weight of the life new-found,
And an old man groans,—with his testament
Only half-signed,—for the life that's spent;
And lovers twain do softly say,
As they sit on a grave, 'For aye, for aye;'
And foemen twain, while Earth their mother
Looks greenly upward, curse each other:
A school-boy drones his task, with looks
Cast over the page to the elm-tree rooks;
A lonely student cries aloud
Eureka! clasping at his shroud;
A beldame's age-cracked voice doth sing
To a little infant slumbering;
A maid forgotten weeps alone,
Muffling her sobs on the trysting-stone;
A sick man wakes at his own mouth's wail,
A gossip coughs in her thrice-told tale,
A muttering gamester shakes the dice,
A reaper foretells goodluck from the skies,
A monarch vows as he lifts his hand to them;
A patriot leaving his native land to them,
Cries to the world against perjured state;
A priest disserts upon linen skirts,
A sinner screams for one hope more,
A dancer's feet do palpitate
A piper's music out on the floor;
And nigh to the awful Dead, the living

Low speech and stealthy steps are giving,
Because he cannot hear;
And *he* who on that narrow bier
Has room enough, is closely wound
In a silence piercing more than sound.

III.

Harken, harken!
God speaketh to thy soul,
Using the súpreme voice which doth confound
All life with consciousness of Deity,
All senses into one,—
As the seer-saint of Patmos, loving John
(For whom did backward roll
The cloud-gate of the future) turned to *see*
The Voice which spake. It speaketh now,
Through the regular breath of the calm creation,
Through the moan of the creature's desolation
Striking, and in its stroke resembling
The memory of a solemn vow
Which pierceth the din of a festival
To one in the midst,—and he letteth fall
The cup with a sudden trembling.

IV.

Harken, harken!
God speaketh in thy soul,
Saying, 'O thou that movest
With feeble steps across this earth of Mine,

To break beside the fount thy golden bowl
And spill its purple wine,—
Look up to heaven and see how, like a scroll,
My right hand hath thine immortality
In an eternal grasping! thou, that lovest
The songful birds and grasses underfoot,
And also what change mars and tombs pollute—
I am the end of love! give love to *Me!*
O thou that sinnest, grace doth more abound
Than all thy sin! sit still beneath My rood,
And count the droppings of My victim-blood,
And seek none other sound!'

v.

Harken, harken!
Shall we hear the lapsing river
And our brother's sighing ever,
And not the voice of God?

THE SOUL'S EXPRESSION.

With stammering lips and insufficient sound
I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night
With dream and thought and feeling interwound,
And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of the sensual ground.
This song of soul I struggle to outbear
Through portals of the sense, sublime and whole,
And utter all myself into the air:
But if I did it,—as the thunder-roll
Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would perish there,
Before that dread apocalypse of soul.

THE SERAPH AND POET.

THE seraph sings before the manifest
God-One, and in the burning of the Seven,
And with the full life of consummate Heaven
Heaving beneath him like a mother's breast
Warm with her first-born's slumber in that nest
The poet sings upon the earth grave-riven,
Before the naughty world, soon self-forgiven
For wronging him,—and in the darkness prest
From his own soul by worldly weights. Even so,
Sing, seraph with the glory! heaven is high;
Sing, poet with the sorrow! earth is low:
The universe's inward voices cry
'Amen' to either song of joy and woe:
Sing, seraph,—poet,—sing on equally!

BEREAVEMENT.

When some Beloveds, 'neath whose eyelids lay
The sweet lights of my childhood, one by one
Did leave me dark before the natural sun,
And I astonied fell and could not pray,—
A thought within me to myself did say,
'Is God less God, that *thou* art left undone?
Rise, worship, bless Him, in this sackcloth spun,
As in that purple!'—But I answered, Nay!
What child his filial heart in words can loose
If he behold his tender father raise
The hand that chastens sorely? can he choose
But sob in silence with an upward gaze?—
And *my* great Father, thinking fit to bruise,
Discerns in speechless tears both prayer and praise.

CONSOLATION.

All are not taken; there are left behind
Living Beloveds, tender looks to bring
And make the daylight still a happy thing,
And tender voices, to make soft the wind:
But if it were not so—if I could find
No love in all the world for comforting,
Nor any path but hollowly did ring
Where 'dust to dust' the love from life disjoined,
And if, before those sepulchres unmoving
I stood alone, (as some forsaken lamb
Goes bleating up the moors in weary dearth)
Crying 'Where are ye, O my loved and loving?'—
I know a Voice would sound, 'Daughter, I am.
Can I suffice for Heaven and not for earth?'

TO MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

IN HER GARDEN.

WHAT time I lay these rhymes anear thy feet,
Benignant friend, I will not proudly say
As better poets use, 'These *flowers* I lay,'
Because I would not wrong thy roses sweet,
Blaspheming so their name. And yet, repeat
Thou, overleaning them this springtime day,
With heart as open to love as theirs to May,
—'Low-rooted verse may reach some heavenly heat,
Even like my blossoms, if as nature-true
Though not as precious.' Thou art unperplext,
Dear friend, in whose dear writings drops the dew
And blow the natural airs,—thou, who art next
To nature's self in cheering the world's view,—
To preach a sermon on so known a text!

ON A PORTRAIT OF WORDSWORTH BY B. R. HAYDON.

Wordsworth upon Helvellyn! Let the cloud
Ebb audibly along the mountain-wind
Then break against the rock, and show behind
The lowland valleys floating up to crowd
The sense with beauty. He with forehead bowed
And humble-lidded eyes, as one inclined
Before the sovran thought of his own mind,
And very meek with inspirations proud,
Takes here his rightful place as poet-priest
By the high altar, singing prayer and prayer
To the higher Heavens. A noble vision free
Our Haydon's hand has flung out from the mist:
No portrait this, with Academic air!
This is the poet and his poetry.

PAST AND FUTURE.

—•—

My future will not copy fair my past
On any leaf but Heaven's. Be fully done,
Supernal Will! I would not fain be one
Who, satisfying thirst and breaking fast,
Upon the fulness of the heart at last
Says no grace after meat. My wine has run
Indeed out of my cup, and there is none
To gather up the bread of my repast
Scattered and trampled; yet I find some good
In earth's green herbs, and streams that bubble up
Clear from the darkling ground,—content until
I sit with angels before better food:
Dear Christ! when Thy new vintage fills my cup,
This hand shall shake no more, nor that wine spill.

IRREPARABLENESS.

I HAVE been in the meadows all the day
And gathered there the nosegay that you see,
Singing within myself as bird or bee
When such do field-work on a morn of May.
But now I look upon my flowers, decay
Has met them in my hands more fatally
Because more warmly clasped,—and sobs are free
To come instead of songs. What do you say,
Sweet counsellors, dear friends? that I should go
Back straightway to the fields and gather more?
Another, sooth, may do it, but not I!
My heart is very tired, my strength is low,
My hands are full of blossoms plucked before
Held dead within them till myself shall die.

TEARS.

THANK God, bless God, all ye who suffer not
More grief than ye can weep for. That is well—
That is light grieving! lighter, none befell
Since Adam forfeited the primal lot.
Tears! what are tears? The babe weeps in its cot,
The mother singing; at her marriage-bell
The bride weeps, and before the oracle
Of high-faned hills the poet has forgot
Such moisture on his cheeks. Thank God for grace,
Ye who weep only! If, as some have done,
Ye grope tear-blinded in a desert place
And touch but tombs,—look up! those tears will run
Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,
And leave the vision clear for stars and sun.

GRIEF.

I TELL you, hopeless grief is passionless;
That only men incredulous of despair,
Half-taught in anguish, through the midnight air
Beat upward to God's throne in loud access
Of shrieking and reproach. Full desertness
In souls as countries, lieth silent-bare
Under the blanching, vertical eye-glare
Of the absolute Heavens. Deep-hearted man, express
Grief for thy Dead in silence like to death—
Most like a monumental statue set
In everlasting watch and moveless woe
Till itself crumble to the dust beneath.
Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet:
If it could weep, it could arise and go.

SUBSTITUTION.

WHEN some belovëd voice that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease and new—
What hope? what help? what music will undo
That silence to your sense? Not friendship's sigh,
Not reason's subtle count; not melody
Of viols, nor of pipes that Faunus blew;
Not songs of poets, nor of nightingales
Whose hearts leap upward through the cypress-trees
To the clear moon; nor yet the spheric laws
Self-chanted, nor the angels' sweet All hails,
Met in the smile of God: nay, none of these.
Speak THOU, availing Christ!—and fill this pause.

COMFORT.

SPEAK low to me, my Saviour, low and sweet
From out the hallelujahs, sweet and low,
Lest I should fear and fall, and miss Thee so
Who art not missed by any that entreat.
Speak to me as to Mary at Thy feet!
And if no precious gums my hands bestow,
Let my tears drop like amber while I go
In reach of Thy divinest voice complete
In humanest affection—thus, in sooth,
To lose the sense of losing. As a child,
Whose song-bird seeks the wood for evermore,
Is sung to in its stead by mother's mouth
Till, sinking on her breast, love-reconciled,
He sleeps the faster that he wept before.

PERPLEXED MUSIC.

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO E. J.

Experience, like a pale musician, holds
A dulcimer of patience in his hand,
Whence harmonies we cannot understand,
Of God's will in His worlds, the strain unfolds
In sad, perplexëd minors: deathly colds
Fall on us while we hear, and countermand
Our sanguine heart back from the fancy-land
With nightingales in visionary wolds.
We murmur, 'Where is any certain tune
Or measured music in such notes as these?'
But angels, leaning from the golden seat,
Are not so minded; their fine ear hath won
The issue of completed cadences,
And, smiling down the stars, they whisper—Sweet.

WORK.

—♦—

WHAT are we set on earth for? Say, to toil;
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
For all the heat o' the day, till it declines,
And Death's mild curfew shall from work assoil.
God did anoint thee with His odorous oil,
To wrestle, not to reign; and He assigns
All thy tears over, like pure crystallines,
For younger fellow-workers of the soil
To wear for amulets. So others shall
Take patience, labour, to their heart and hand,
From thy hand and thy heart and thy brave cheer,
And God's grace fructify through thee to all.
The least flower, with a brimming cup may stand,
And share its dew-drop with another near.

FUTURITY.

And, O belovëd voices, upon which
Ours passionately call because erelong
Ye brake off in the middle of that song
We sang together softly, to enrich
The poor world with the sense of love, and witch
The heart out of things evil,—I am strong,
Knowing ye are not lost for aye among
The hills, with last year's thrush. God keeps a niche
In Heaven to hold our idols: and albeit
He brake them to our faces and denied
That our close kisses should impair their white,
I know we shall behold them raised, complete,
The dust swept from their beauty,—glorified
New Memnons singing in the great God-light.

THE TWO SAYINGS.

Two sayings of the Holy Scriptures beat
Like pulses in the church's brow and breast;
And by them we find rest in our unrest
And, heart-deep in salt tears, do yet entreat,
God's fellowship as if on heavenly seat.
The first is JESUS WEPT,—whereon is prest
Full many a sobbing face that drops its best
And sweetest waters on the record sweet:
And one is where the Christ, denied and scorned,
LOOKED UPON PETER. Oh, to render plain,
By help of having loved a little and mourned,
That look of sovran love and sovran pain
Which HE, who could not sin yet suffered, turned
On him who could reject but not sustain!

THE LOOK.

THE Saviour looked on Peter. Ay, no word.
No gesture of reproach; the Heavens serene
Though heavy with armed justice, did not lean
Their thunders that way: the forsaken Lord
Looked only, on the traitor. None record
What that look was, none guess; for those who have seen
Wronged lovers loving through a death-pang keen,
Or pale-cheeked martyrs smiling to a sword,
Have missed Jehovah at the judgment-call.
And Peter, from the height of blasphemy—
'I never knew this man'—did quail and fall
As knowing straight THAT GOD; and turnëd free
And went out speechless from the face of all,
And filled the silence, weeping bitterly.

THE MEANING OF THE LOOK.

I THINK that look of Christ might seem to say—
'Thou Peter! art thou then a common stone
Which I at last must break my heart upon,
For all God's charge to His high angels may
Guard my foot better? Did I yesterday
Wash *thy* feet, my beloved, that they should run
Quick to deny me 'neath the morning sun?
And do thy kisses, like the rest, betray?
The cock crows coldly.—Go, and manifest
A late contrition, but no bootless fear!
For when thy final need is dreariest,
Thou shalt not be denied, as I am here;
My voice to God and angels shall attest,
Because I KNOW *this man, let him be clear.*'

A THOUGHT FOR A LONELY DEATH-BED

INSCRIBED TO MY FRIEND E. C.

If God compel thee to this destiny,
To die alone, with none beside thy bed
To ruffle round with sobs thy last word said
And mark with tears the pulses ebb from thee,—
Pray then alone, 'O Christ, come tenderly!
By Thy forsaken Sonship in the red
Drear wine-press,—by the wilderness outspread,—
And the lone garden where Thine agony
Fell bloody from Thy brow,—by all of those
Permitted desolations, comfort mine!
No earthly friend being near me, interpose
No deathly angel 'twixt my face and Thine,
But stoop Thyself to gather my life's rose,
And smile away my mortal to Divine!'

WORK AND CONTEMPLATION.

THE woman singeth at her spinning-wheel
A pleasant chant, ballad or barcarole;
She thinketh of her song, upon the whole,
Far more than of her flax; and yet the reel
Is full, and artfully her fingers feel
With quick adjustment, provident control,
The lines, too subtly twisted to unroll,
Out to a perfect thread. I hence appeal
To the dear Christian church—that we may do
Our Father's business in these temples mirk,
Thus swift and steadfast, thus intent and strong;
While thus, apart from toil, our souls pursue
Some high, calm, spheric tune, and prove our work
The better for the sweetness of our song.

PAIN IN PLEASURE.

A THOUGHT lay like a flower upon mine heart,
And drew around it other thoughts like bees
For multitude and thirst of sweetnesses;
Whereat rejoicing, I desired the art
Of the Greek whistler, who to wharf and mart
Could lure those insect swarms from orange-trees,
That I might hive with me such thoughts and please
My soul so, always. Foolish counterpart
Of a weak man's vain wishes! While I spoke,
The thought I called a flower grew nettle-rough,
The thoughts, called bees, stung me to festering:
Oh, entertain (cried Reason as she woke,)
Your best and gladdest thoughts but long enough,
And they will all prove sad enough to sting!

FLUSH OR FAUNUS.

You see this dog; it was but yesterday
I mused forgetful of his presence here
Till thought on thought drew downward tear on tear:
When from the pillow where wet-cheeked I lay,
A head as hairy as Faunus thrust its way
Right sudden against my face, two golden-clear
Great eyes astonished mine, a drooping ear
Did flap me on either cheek to dry the spray!
I started first as some Arcadian
Amazed by goatly god in twilight grove
But as the bearded vision closelier ran
My tears off, I knew Flush, and rose above
Surprise and sadness,—thanking the true PAN
Who by low creatures leads to heights of love.

FINITE AND INFINITE.

THE wind sounds only in opposing straits,
The sea, beside the shore; man's spirit rends
Its quiet only up against the ends
Of wants and oppositions, loves and hates,
Where, worked and worn by passionate debates,
And losing by the loss it apprehends,
The flesh rocks round and every breath it sends
Is ravelled to a sigh. All tortured states
Suppose a straitened place. Jehovah Lord,
Make room for rest, around me! out of sight
Now float me, of the vexing land abhorred,
Till in deep calms of space my soul may right
Her nature, shoot large sail on lengthening cord,
And rush exultant on the Infinite.

AN APPREHENSION.

If all the gentlest-hearted friends I know
Concentred in one heart their gentleness,
That still grew gentler till its pulse was less
For life than pity,—I should yet be slow
To bring my own heart nakedly below
The palm of such a friend, that he should press
Motive, condition, means, appliances,
My false ideal joy and fickle woe,
Out full to light and knowledge; I should fear
Some plait between the brows, some rougher chime
In the free voice. O angels, let your flood
Of bitter scorn dash on me! do ye hear
What *I* say who bear calmly all the time
This everlasting face to face with God?

DISCONTENT.

LIGHT human nature is too lightly tost
And ruffled without cause, complaining on,
Restless with rest, until, being overthrown,
It learneth to lie quiet. Let a frost
Or a small wasp have crept to the innermost
Of our ripe peach, or let the wilful sun
Shine westward of our window,—straight we run
A furlong's sigh as if the world were lost.
But what time through the heart and through the brain
God hath transfixed us,—we, so moved before,
Attain to a calm. Ay, shouldering weights of pain,
We anchor in deep waters, safe from shore,
And hear submissive o'er the stormy main
God's chartered judgments walk for evermore.

PATIENCE TAUGHT BY NATURE.

'O DREARY life,' we cry, 'O dreary life!'
And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and herds
Serenely live while we are keeping strife
With Heaven's true purpose in us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle! Ocean girds
Unslackened the dry land, savannah-swards
Unweary sweep, hills watch unworn, and rife
Meek leaves drop yearly from the forest-trees
To show, above, the unwasted stars that pass
In their old glory: O thou God of old,
Grant me some smaller grace than comes to these!—
But so much patience as a blade of grass
Grows by, contented through the heat and cold.

CHEERFULNESS TAUGHT BY REASON.

I THINK we are too ready with complaint
In this fair world of God's. Had we no hope
Indeed beyond the zenith and the slope
Of yon grey blank of sky, we might grow faint
To muse upon eternity's constraint
Round our aspirant souls; but since the scope
Must widen early, is it well to droop,
For a few days consumed in loss and taint?
O pusillanimous Heart, be comforted
And, like a cheerful traveller, take the road,
Singing beside the hedge. What if the bread
Be bitter in thine inn, and thou unshod
To meet the flints? At least it may be said,
'Because the way is *short*, I thank thee, God'

EXAGGERATION.

We overstate the ills of life, and take
Imagination (given us to bring down
The choirs of singing angels overshone
By God's clear glory) down our earth to rake
The dismal snows instead, flake following flake,
To cover all the corn; we walk upon
The shadow of hills across a level thrown,
And pant like climbers: near the alderbrake
We sigh so loud, the nightingale within
Refuses to sing loud, as else she would.
O brothers, let us leave the shame and sin
Of taking vainly, in a plaintive mood,
The holy name of Grief!—holy herein,
That by the grief of One came all our good.

ADEQUACY.

Now, by the verdure on thy thousand hills,
Belovëd England, doth the earth appear
Quite good enough for men to overbear
The will of God in, with rebellious wills!
We cannot say the morning-sun fulfils
Ingloriously its course, nor that the clear
Strong stars without significance insphere
Our habitation: we, meantime, our ills
Heap up against this good and lift a cry
Against this work-day world, this ill-spread feast,
As if ourselves were better certainly
Than what we come to. Maker and High Priest,
I ask thee not my joys to multiply,—
Only to make me worthier of the least.

TO GEORGE SAND.

A DESIRE.

Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man,
Self-called George Sand! whose soul, amid the lions
Of thy tumultuous senses, moans defiance
And answers roar for roar, as spirits can:
I would some mild miraculous thunder ran
Above the applauded circus, in appliance
Of thine own nobler nature's strength and science,
Drawing two pinions, white as wings of swan,
From thy strong shoulders, to amaze the place
With holier light! that thou to woman's claim
And man's, might'st join beside the angel's grace
Of a pure genius sanctified from blame,
Till child and maiden pressed to thine embrace
To kiss upon thy lips a stainless fame.

TO GEORGE SAND.

A RECOGNITION.

TRUE genius, but true woman! dost deny
The woman's nature with a manly scorn,
And break away the gauds and armlets worn
By weaker women in captivity?
Ah, vain denial! that revolted cry
Is sobbed in by a woman's voice forlorn,—
Thy woman's hair, my sister, all unshorn
Floats back dishevelled strength in agony,
Disproving thy man's name: and while before
The world thou burnest in a poet-fire,
We see thy woman-heart beat evermore
Through the large flame. Beat purer, heart, and higher,
Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore
Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire!

THE PRISONER.

I COUNT the dismal time by months and years
Since last I felt the green sward under foot,
And the great breath of all things summer-mute
Met mine upon my lips. Now earth appears
As strange to me as dreams of distant spheres
Or thoughts of Heaven we weep at. Nature's lute
Sounds on, behind this door so closely shut,
A strange wild music to the prisoner's ears,
Dilated by the distance, till the brain
Grows dim with fancies which it feels too fine,
While ever, with a visionary pain,
Past the precluded senses, sweep and shine
Streams, forests, glades, and many a golden train
Of sunlit hills transfigured to Divine.

INSUFFICIENCY.

When I attain to utter forth in verse
Some inward thought, my soul throbs audibly
Along my pulses, yearning to be free
And something farther, fuller, higher, rehearse,
To the individual, true, and the universe,
In consummation of right harmony:
But, like a wind-exposed distorted tree,
We are blown against for ever by the curse
Which breathes through nature. Oh, the world is weal.,
The effluence of each is false to all,
And what we best conceive we fail to speak.
Wait, soul, until thine ashen garments fall,
And then resume thy broken strains, and seek
Fit peroration without let or thrall.

TWO SKETCHES.

H. B.

I.

THE shadow of her face upon the wall
May take your memory to the perfect Greek,
But when you front her, you would call the cheek
Too full, sir, for your models, if withal
That bloom it wears could leave you critical,
And that smile reaching toward the rosy streak;
For one who smiles so, has no need to speak
To lead your thoughts along, as steed to stall.
A smile that turns the sunny side o' the heart
On all the world, as if herself did win
By what she lavished on an open mart!
Let no man call the liberal sweetness, sin,—
For friends may whisper as they stand apart,
'Methinks there's still some warmer place within.'

A. B.

II.

Her azure eyes, dark lashes hold in fee;
Her fair superfluous ringlets without check
Drop after one another down her neck,
As many to each cheek as you might see
Green leaves to a wild rose; this sign outwardly,
And a like woman-covering seems to deck
Her inner nature, for she will not fleck
World's sunshine with a finger. Sympathy
Must call her in Love's name! and then, I know,
She rises up, and brightens as she should,
And lights her smile for comfort, and is slow
In nothing of high-hearted fortitude.
To smell this flower, come near it! such can grow
In that sole garden where Christ's brow dropped blood.

MOUNTAINEER AND POET.

THE simple goatherd between Alp and sky,
Seeing his shadow, in that awful tryst,
Dilated to a giant's on the mist,
Esteems not his own stature larger by
The apparent image, but more patiently
Strikes his staff down beneath his clenching fist,
While the snow-mountains lift their amethyst
And sapphire crowns of splendour, far and nigh,
Into the air around him. Learn from hence
Meek morals, all ye poets that pursue
Your way still onward up to eminence
Ye are not great because creation drew
Large revelations round your earliest sense,
Nor bright because God's glory shines for you.

THE POET.

THE poet hath the child's sight in his breast
And sees all *new*. What oftenest he has viewed,
He views with the first glory. Fair and good
Pall never on him, at the fairest, best,
But stand before him holy and undressed
In week-day false conventions, such as would
Drag other men down from the altitude
Of primal types, too early dispossessed.
Why, God would tire of all his heavens, as soon
As thou, O godlike, childlike poet, didst
Of daily and nightly sights of sun and moon!
And therefore hath He set thee in the midst
Where men may hear thy wonder's ceaseless tune,
And praise His world for ever, as thou bidst.

HIRAM POWERS' GREEK SLAVE.

THEY say Ideal beauty cannot enter
The house of anguish. On the threshold stands
An alien Image with enshackled hands,
Called the Greek Slave! as if the artist meant her
(That passionless perfection which he lent her,
Shadowed not darkened where the sill expands)
To so confront man's crimes in different lands
With man's ideal sense. Pierce to the centre,
Art's fiery finger! and break up ere long
The serfdom of this world! appeal, fair stone,
From God's pure heights of beauty against man's wrong!
Catch up in thy divine face, not alone
East griefs but west, and strike and shame the strong,
By thunders of white silence, overthrown.

LIFE.

EACH creature holds an insular point in space;
Yet what man stirs a finger, breathes a sound,
But all the multitudinous beings round
In all the countless worlds with time and place
For their conditions, down to the central base,
Thrill, haply, in vibration and rebound,
Life answering life across the vast profound,
In full antiphony, by a common grace?
I think this sudden joyaunce which illumes
A child's mouth sleeping, unaware may run
From some soul newly loosened from earth's tombs:
I think this passionate sigh, which half-begun
I stifle back, may reach and stir the plumes
Of God's calm angel standing in the sun.

LOVE.

We cannot live, except thus mutually
We alternate, aware or unaware,
The reflex act of life; and when we bear
Our virtue outward most impulsively,
Most full of invocation, and to be
Most instantly compellant, certes there
We live most life, whoever breathes most air
And counts his dying years by sun and sea:
But when a soul, by choice and conscience, doth
Throw out her full force on another soul,
The conscience and the concentration both
Make mere life, Love. For Life in perfect whole
And aim consummated, is Love in sooth,
As nature's magnet-heat rounds pole with pole.

HEAVEN AND EARTH.

"And there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour."
Revelation.

GOD, who with thunders and great voices kept
Beneath Thy throne, and stars most silver-paced
Along the inferior gyres, and open-faced
Melodious angels round,—canst intercept
Music with music,—yet, at will, hast swept
All back, all back, (said he in Patmos placed)
To fill the heavens with silence of the waste
Which lasted half an hour!—lo, I who have wept
All day and night, beseech Thee by my tears,
And by that dread response of curse and groan
Men alternate across these hemispheres,
Vouchsafe us such a half-hour's hush alone,
In compensation for our stormy years:
As heaven has paused from song, let earth from moan!

THE PROSPECT.

Methinks we do as fretful children do,
Leaning their faces on the window-pane
To sigh the glass dim with their own breath's stain,
And shut the sky and landscape from their view:
And thus, alas, since God the maker drew
A mystic separation 'twixt those twain,
The life beyond us, and our souls in pain,
We miss the prospect which we are called unto
By grief we are fools to use. Be still and strong,
O man, my brother! hold thy sobbing breath,
And keep thy soul's large window pure from wrong;
That so, as life's appointment issueth,
Thy vision may be clear to watch along
The sunset consummation-lights of death.

HUGH STUART BOYD.*

HIS BLINDNESS.

God would not let the spheric lights accost
This God-loved man, and bade the earth stand off
With all her beckoning hills whose golden stuff
Under the feet of the royal sun is crossed.
Yet such things were to him not wholly lost,—
Permitted, with his wandering eyes light-proof,
To catch fair visions rendered full enough
By many a ministrant accomplished ghost,—
Still seeing, to sounds of softly-turned book-leaves,
Sappho's crown-rose, and Meleager's spring,
And Gregory's starlight on Greek-burnished eves:
Till Sensuous and Unsensuous seemed one thing,
Viewed from one level,—earth's reapers at the sheaves
Scarce plainer than Heaven's angels on the wing.

* To whom was inscribed, in grateful affection, my poem of "Cyprus Wine." There comes a moment in life when even gratitude and affection turn to pain, as they do now with me. This excellent and learned man, enthusiastic for the good and the beautiful, and one of the most simple and upright of human beings, passed out of his long darkness through death in the summer of 1848; Dr. Adam Clarke's daughter and biographer, Mrs. Smith, (happier in this than the absent) fulfilling a doubly filial duty as she sate by the death-bed of her father's friend and hers.

HUGH STUART BOYD.

HIS DEATH, 1848.

Beloved friend, who living many years
With sightless eyes raised vainly to the sun,
Didst learn to keep thy patient soul in tune
To visible nature's elemental cheers!
God has not caught thee to new hemispheres
Because thou wast aweary of this one;—
I think thine angel's patience first was done,
And that he spake out with celestial tears,
'Is it enough, dear God? then lighten so
This soul that smiles in darkness!'
Steadfast friend,
Who never didst my heart or life misknow,
Nor either's faults too keenly apprehend,—
How can I wonder when I see thee go
To join the Dead found faithful to the end?

HUGH STUART BOYD.

LEGACIES.

THREE gifts the Dying left me,—Æschylus,
And Gregory Nazianzen, and a clock
Chiming the gradual hours out like a flock
Of stars whose motion is melodious.
The books were those I used to read from, thus
Assisting my dear teacher's soul to unlock
The darkness of his eyes; now, mine they mock,
Blinded in turn by tears; now, murmurous
Sad echoes of my young voice, years agone
Entoning from these leaves the Grecian phrase,
Return and choke my utterance. Books, lie down
In silence on the shelf there, within gaze;
And thou, clock, striking the hour's pulses on,
Chime in the day which ends these parting-days!

END OF VOL. II.


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